



A
PRINCESS
OF ARCADY

ARTHUR
HENRY

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To Frank Norris

who has abetted me,

Arthur Henry

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BY

ARTHUR HENRY

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I dedicate this story to

ANNA T. MALLON

ON WHOSE ATTITUDE TOWARD HER OWN CONVENT
LIFE WAS FOUNDED THE CONVENT OF "OUR LADY
OF PEACE"

A PRINCESS OF ARCADY

CHAPTER I

AN island of a hundred acres — Pilliod's Island. He called it his little France. On one side it rose abruptly eight feet from the river, and on the other, the water, when at high tide, rippled over its green surface. From this marshy border rose a tangled growth of reeds and swamp grasses, elder-berry bushes, and flaming weeds and wild flowers. It was a great opal of an island, rich in colour, that changed not only with the seasons, but with every hour, as the sunshine or the clouds passed over it. The high banks of the river swept in a wide circle about it. There was a suggestion of pride and protection in the lines of the surrounding shores, as if they were saying to any one who could interpret their language, "Would you see a few acres of Paradise?"

Then look over at our little island here. Even God can make nothing more beautiful."

At one end was the vineyard where every year the grapes swelled to great purple globes of juice. In the early spring, as soon as the snow vanished, the whole island donned a garment of light green while the fields of the surrounding high lands were still cold and bare. Then, day by day, just by going to the edge of the bluff and looking down, you would see the lines forming which divided the corn, the wheat, the oats, and the hayfields into squares of different shades. As the harvest approached, you could see a counterpane of gorgeous patches, for then the wheat was a mass of shining yellow, except where the shadow of a cloud was moving; the oats had a russet tinge, the corn was a deep rich green, and in the motley of the hayfields purple and grey prevailed, with here and there a patch of wild mustard or a stalk of mullein.

On the west side of the river stands the village of Maumee, and directly across, a mile away, is Perrysburg. These villages lie close to the river and watch each other

across the island with a drowsy jealousy. It is the kind of jealousy that harms no one.

When the Angelus is sounded at morning, noon, and sunset, the bell-ringers of the two villages so time their strokes that the chime of one seems like the far-off echo of the other.

One morning in early spring, Minot Alexander stood upon the bluff overlooking the island. He saw old Jean Pilliod carefully picking his way along the well-worn path down the hillside. His feet were bare, and his blue jean trousers were rolled part way to his knees. His thick hair, perfectly white, fell to his shoulders. Although he walked with the precaution which comes with age, he seemed a sturdy figure. Mr. Alexander watched him until he reached the raft moored to the bank, which took him to and from his island, and then, upon an impulse, he called to him. Receiving no response, he remembered that old Pilliod was growing deaf. He looked at the steep bank before him, with the first intention of scrambling down it, and laughed as he remembered that he, too, was growing old. He hurried to the

path, and descending as rapidly as possible, came upon old Pilliod just as he was pushing off.

“Take me with you,” he called.

The other, hearing him, now looked up and peered at him a moment from a pair of bright eyes that twinkled from beneath his heavy grey brows.

“Well, well,” he said, “you are here again. You come as regularly in the spring as the swallows.”

He pushed back to the shore and helped his old friend aboard.

Any one noticing the hands of the two as they clasped would know at once how far removed were the worlds in which they toiled.

Old Jean Pilliod's were twisted and hard as a well-seasoned apple bough. He seized his pole and skilfully pushed the raft from the island. He knew all the tricks of the current, and they no longer seemed malicious to him, but more like the eccentricities of a friend whom we have learned to live with.

Minot watched him in silence for a moment, and then he said:—

“This is a fine life you lead. When I

come to the country, I wish that I might never leave it."

"Would you like to have fingers like these?" said old Jean Pilliod, holding out one of his hands, bent and stiff. "And then, too, you see my back is crooked. That's what comes from working in the fields."

Minot smiled, but said nothing. No one could be more careful of his personal appearance than he, and yet it signified nothing to him. Every day he conducted the affairs of his business carefully, adding something to his fortune; but this was a matter of course, and he had long since ceased to take any interest in it. It meant nothing to him. The money that he accumulated he had no desire to spend, for he was alone in the world.

When they reached the island, they separated, and Jean Pilliod trudged off to his fields. Minot Alexander had no other purpose than to spend an aimless, pleasant day. As he was walking along the marshy border, his attention was caught by a bright pink blossom which seemed unusual to him.

"I will get that," he said, "and ask Christopher Mott what it is."

The blossom, however, was just out of his reach. He could approach no nearer without sinking into the marsh.

He cut a stout branch from a bush, and with a swift stroke severed the blossom from its stalk and brought it to his feet. It happened that at that moment a bee was delving in the blossom, and outraged by the death of its mistress, it flew fiercely about his head.

Mr. Alexander, surprised at the sudden attack, attempted in vain to defend himself, but the bee would not be frightened off. Mr. Alexander took to his heels. He sped across the field, waving his arms with the most undignified vehemence. Freed from his pursuer, he continued his flight for a few moments in pure enjoyment of the exhilaration it brought him. The adventure had made him feel something of a boy again. He stopped abruptly, however, when he saw immediately in his path two children in an attitude of fright. A slender little boy was standing boldly upright, courageous and terror-stricken, while crouching behind him was a little girl. Her hands were clutching the boy's coat desperately, and her bright eyes were fixed in an agony of alarm upon what

must have seemed to her a destroying monster. Mr. Alexander stood quietly before them for a moment, and looked down upon them, smiling kindly.

“Don’t be frightened, little ones,” he said; “I would not harm you for the world.”

He looked as he spoke into the eyes of the little girl, and her face at once brightened, flushed with the colour that was natural to it, and broke into dimples as she smiled.

“That’s right,” he said; “you must not be afraid of me, for I was just looking for some one to play with.”

The child laughed, a little nervously, it is true, and, stepping nearer, she looked up into his face and said:—

“You would not hurt us, would you? I really wasn’t very much afraid, but you were so big, you know, and you did look terrible.”

“I wasn’t afraid at all,” said the boy. “I knew you were only trying to frighten us.”

“Oh no, it wasn’t that,” said Mr. Alexander. “I was only running away from a great big bee; so you see I am the only coward here.”

“Are you afraid of bees?” said the boy, contemptuously. “They won’t hurt any one.”

“Sometimes they do,” said the little girl,

as if trying to make matters more easy for her new friend. The boy seemed to catch the spirit of this apology, and said, with a touch of patronage, that he was afraid of snakes. The girl, as if recognizing that this was a good time to drop the subject, cried with a pretty air of affected grief: —

“See, I have dropped all my flowers.”

“So you have,” said Mr. Alexander, and they all three began hastily to gather the scattered buttercups and dandelions and spring beauties that lay upon the ground.

“I have never seen you before,” said the little girl. “Where do you live?”

“In the city,” he replied; “in the big city down the river.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the boy, in a long note of awe as he looked toward the steeples and the vague outlines of the tall buildings that could be faintly discerned in the distance.

Mr. Alexander caught the expression of his face, and it sent a pang through his heart. He looked toward the city, and for a moment as if seeing it through the eyes of the boy, its outlines, softened through the blue mist, took fantastic shapes. It became to him also a mirage of fairyland. Oh, he thought if he

could but again see the world with the wistful eyes of his youth.

The little girl said, with a sigh of relief: "I am so glad. I thought when I first saw you that you had at last come from that big house way over there," pointing to a distant building on the mainland; "for that, you know, is where the ogre lives."

"The ogre!" exclaimed Mr. Alexander. "What makes you think that?"

"Oh," said the girl, looking at him gravely, "my mamma says so, and she says if ever I am out alone at night, that he will get me."

"Humph!" was all that Mr. Alexander answered, for he did not know how far he could venture with a mother's discipline, but it seemed to him a pity that so sunny a little soul should be unnecessarily troubled with fears. "I should think," he said to himself, "that there are enough real cares to contend with without creating imaginary ones."

"I have been to the city once," said the boy, "and some day when I am big I will live there, too."

"Would you rather —" he stopped, saying to himself that he would not be the one to destroy an illusion. Turning to the girl,

he asked, "Would you like to live in the city, too?"

"Yes," she replied, "if ever the prince should come to marry me. Pierre says he is going to be the prince some day when he is big, and then I will go and live with him in one of those palaces there."

"But ar'n't you happy here in these pretty green fields, with so many flowers for you to pick, and the birds to sing to you?"

"Oh, yes," she said, "but I am only a little girl now, and Pierre is here to play with me, but when he goes, I must go too."

Mr. Alexander learned that the boy was a grandson of old Jean Pilliod, and that the man following sturdily behind the plough in one of the fields was his father. The girl was a daughter of a fisherman who occupied a little hut at one end of the island. Her mother was sick, and it was for her the flowers had been gathered. He knew at once how poor and commonplace must be the life awaiting her, and he looked with pity upon her bright and eager face as he thought what desolate realities would come to her in place of her fancies. It could only be some worthless fellow who would lead the life of a fisher-

man along this river, which had long since ceased to supply a product sufficient for the market. Her father must be some ne'er-do-well, who, by occasional jobs that could be handled without too much effort, and the small catch which would come from a day's fishing, managed just to live. He thought of his own wealth, and how useless it was, and wondered vaguely if it would be possible for him, had he a little girl like this, to make her dreams come true.

At noon, the Angelus again sounded, and the bells from the two villages floating over the island blended in an indescribably soft melody.

Mr. Alexander heard the voice of Jean Pilliod calling to him as he trudged toward the house for dinner.

The little girl took his hand and said eagerly, "Don't go away. Won't you come with me?"

"But," said he, hesitating, "if your mamma is sick, I shall trouble her."

"Oh no," she said, "I will have two little fish for my dinner, and you may have one of them."

He sent word by the boy, and went with

the little girl to the hut. He found it to be a place of two small rooms. A pan of fish was sputtering upon the stove, and by it, on a rough hand-made chair, sat a woman very pale and thin. He was startled by her appearance. Her eyes were closed, and her hands were hanging listlessly by her side. She did not seem to breathe, and her lifeless face wore the fixed and yet tranquil expression which sometimes follows death. The little girl ran to her, and laying the flowers in her lap, whispered: —

“Look, mamma, at the man I brought you. He lives in the city.”

The woman, a little startled, looked up, and her cheeks became flushed for a moment.

“Your little daughter,” said Mr. Alexander, “and I have been playing together all the morning, and she has promised me one of her fish for my dinner. I hope I shall not trouble you.”

He paused for a moment in some embarrassment, hardly knowing what excuse to offer for his intrusion.

He had thought it possible that he might receive a rough welcome, and, if so, he

had hoped to make amends with a little money.

He found himself in the presence of gentleness and misery, which seized powerfully upon his sympathies, and yet made him almost ashamed of being there.

"I am Mr. Alexander," he said presently, as the woman still looked at him in some confusion, "a friend of Jean Pilliod's. I hardly know why I came, except that your little girl seemed anxious to have me."

"Oh, yes," she answered brightly. "I was afraid at first he was the ogre, but he turned out to be the nicest man."

"I am sure," said the mother, "I am glad that you came with Hilda." She added with a pitiful laugh, which seemed to be the shadow of a once merry temperament: "You see, you are really too late to put me to any trouble, for my dinner is all ready to serve." Turning to Hilda, she said gently, "You will have to hurry, daughter, for the fish are almost done, and the table isn't set."

Hilda went at once to one corner of the room which was evidently devoted to her own use. Here was a little box that served as a toilet table. It was covered with bright,

clean paper, tacked neatly to the sides. On the top was spread a clean towel which had been elaborately fringed and bordered with a faded ribbon. On it was a small basin and pitcher of tinware, painted blue, and above was a fragment of a mirror suspended by a crocheted net that partially enclosed it. There was something, at the same time, very dainty and very pitiful in the aspect of this corner. Odds and ends of different coloured ribbon, bits of cheap lace and embroidery that might have been picked from a scrap basket, had been utilized as adornment.

"If you would like to use it," said the woman, "there is a wash-basin on the bench outside."

"No, no," cried the little girl, who had already finished her toilet, "I want him to use mine." She seemed, in fact, to look upon Mr. Alexander as her own guest.

There was something very childlike and yet very old in her manner toward him. She led him to her corner, with a sort of gracious eagerness. She poured the water for him, got him a clean towel from the box, and then stood by to see him wash.

"I thought," she said confidentially, "that

you had rather do it here. Don't you think it is pretty? I made all these things; my mamma showed me how."

"Yes," said Mr. Alexander; "I think it's very pretty. I don't think I ever saw a looking-glass in such a curious frame before."

"We made that up," said Hilda, looking at it critically. "At first, I was very sorry that I could only have a broken one."

"I wish I had a little girl who could make such nice things for me. I am sure that is much prettier than anything I can buy."

"And I wish," said the little girl, "that you were my papa. My papa don't seem to care for anything I do, and he don't —"

"Daughter," came the reproving voice of her mother very softly; and Mr. Alexander felt a little confused.

The girl took an apron from her box, and asked Mr. Alexander to tie it on for her.

In another corner of the room stood a larger box which served as a china closet. From this she took a tablecloth, and, with the aid of a chair, proceeded to set the table.

"The little one," said the mother, "is my housekeeper. It is wonderful what she has learned to do. Even when we eat alone and

have just fish for dinner, we have the table set. I want to teach her all I can." She paused a moment, and then added as if to herself, "I am sure I don't know whatever will become of her when I am gone."

All during the meal, the little girl chatted with the curious, nervous incoherence of children when first moved by the desire to please. Her cheeks were flushed. She hardly ate. Her bright eyes were fixed constantly upon her guest, and whenever he looked at her, she smiled in her happiness.

When he left, she seemed taken entirely by surprise. It had not occurred to her that this great new pleasure was such a temporary affair. It takes children a long time to anticipate. No wonder that a little grief assumes the proportions of a tragedy; for them it has no end. I think if we could realize how absolutely the present moment is the child's forever, there would be less punishment, for who would willingly consign one to an eternity of torment and despair?

They were again in the field when the end came.

Their companionship had been an unusual experience to each of them. In this case

the child and the man of sixty felt something of the emotions of young lovers when they first meet. This was so because Mr. Alexander, reserved and conventional in his outward appearance, in reality lived most in that world of ideals and dreams where youth is perpetual and where time and customs are unknown. His very gravity and all his courtly manners had been acquired from the instinct which moves all such men to place a barrier between themselves and the world as they realize that if they would preserve the spirit of their youth, and protect it from the cynicism of others, they must conceal it. In his little companion he had chanced upon a perfect type of the purely feminine. Here were all the traits in embryo which, when preserved and developed, make the ideal woman who is, above all things, sympathetic and receptive, one in whom the very assumption of an interest possesses a more seductive charm than the violent passion of others; whose sins seem more innocent than the virtues of austerity. Such women have inspired, without design, the achievements which have made epochs and kingdoms famous when the patronage of the throne alone would have failed.

It is in the eyes of such that the poet must look for his revelations. They seem to be the unconscious repositories of nature. Their souls are her secret laboratories, her studios, her hidden places, wherein, undisturbed, she works her masterpieces.

Mr. Alexander felt the tenderest and purest delight in the effort to become one with the little girl. And she, less conscious of them, perhaps, than he, was prompted by the same design, and felt something of the same emotions. He was a little less pompous, and she was much more so. It was curious to see how, as she walked with him, she attempted vainly to follow his longer stride. Her manner was a quaint reflection of his. In all that she said there was a very apparent effort to voice what she fancied must be his point of view. She looked about her for new impressions, carefully selecting the longest words in her vocabulary, and sought constantly to repress the vagrant impulses that had never before been restrained. She attempted to express herself judiciously. The fact that her little mind was unusually excited and alert at the very moment when she was attempting to subject it to the control of

unaccustomed influences, produced at times the most astonishing results.

Everything she saw was enlarged or contorted because of this very excitement of her senses. Yielding to her first impulse, she would call his attention to what she saw or fancied with the extravagant gestures and exclamations of a child, but remembering the new part she had to play, she would instantly subdue her manner and seek to qualify her statements, becoming involved at times in a hopeless tangle of words. Sometimes she would hesitate in her embarrassment, and look furtively up into his face. He would nod his head as if assuring her that he understood and finish her sentence for her, and while it might be as illogical as her own, since there was really no thought to express, his manner reassured her, and she was again composed. She wished to please him, that was all. Suddenly was heard the voice of Jean Pilliod, about to return to the mainland.

“And now,” said Mr. Alexander, “I must go.”

She stopped abruptly, and looked questioningly up into his face. The little artificial

smile which she had been rapidly acquiring in her effort of politeness was suspended as it were amid the wreck of her happiness. Then as he held out his hand to her, and said good-by, all her assumptions vanished, and she became at once a woe-begone little child, protesting and anxious.

“Don’t go,” she said, her lips trembling, and the tears rising quickly to her eyes.

“But I must,” said he, picking her up in his arms. “You must not cry. Just think what a nice day we have had, and I will come and see you again.”

She threw her arms about his neck and clung to him, repeating over and over again, with all the unreasonable persistence and impatience of her age: “Don’t go! Don’t go! I don’t want you to go. Please, please don’t go.”

He put her down as gently as he could, and then, into her troubled heart there crept a feeling of humiliation. The memory of what she had tried to be made her ashamed of her tears.

There was a mingling of anxiety, pleading apology, and shyness in the smile that trembled on her lips and in her tearful eyes as

she stood looking at him. She put her finger to her mouth and, turning her body this way and that, said slowly, with an effort not to cry, "Please don't go."

He did not know what to say to her. He realized that argument would be thrown away. His heart responded to the affection of the child, and it was with an unwonted moisture in his own eyes that he turned away.

When she saw that in spite of everything she could do, he had left her, she turned abruptly and ran as fast as she could in the opposite direction. She did not know where she was running. She did not care where she went. She wanted only to get away from the mysterious trouble that beset her.

When Mr. Alexander was again upon the raft with Jean Pilliod, he asked him concerning the little girl and her parents, and found that her father was all that he had feared. He was not harsh or positively evil. He rather lacked good qualities than possessed vices. Among the loungers around the hotel of the village or in the society that gathered on the sidewalk of a summer's evening before the stores, he was the best of company. He seldom drank to excess, and if he did, it only

served to liberate a merry and good-natured spirit. At other times, he was quiet and rather subdued. He could sit all day in his boat, anchored in the midst of the stream, beneath a blazing sun, and fish, taking his good fortune and his bad with indifference. If his catch were good, he would take it to the village, spend his money liberally as long as it lasted, and return to his hut late at night, troubled with a genuine regret that he had not had enough for the things he knew were necessary to the comfort of his family. His wife had married him when she was a young girl, affectionate and simple-minded, and had lived her life apparently without even a thought of discontent. She was by nature a good wife and mother, one of those who respond quickly to whatever surrounds them; who give without any consideration of self-interest all they possess to the first love that is offered. Had this come to her in the person of a noble lover, she would have become a beautiful woman. She was dying from privation of soul and body, but she had no anxiety for herself; no complaint against her lot. She never compared her life with what it might have been. It was not her

imagination that made her fear for her daughter, but the tender heart of a mother quaking at a thousand threatening evils rising half formed and scarcely recognized from her own experiences.

When the two men had crossed the river and ascended the bank upon the other side, they turned of one accord to look back upon the island. This final glance backward had become a habit with Jean Pilliod. His eyes were still very bright, but his sight was growing dim, so that he could scarcely distinguish an object fifty feet from him.

"I will wait here," said Mr. Alexander, "until the vespers ring." Jean Pilliod smiled and shook his head.

"I don't need to wait for the bell-ringers any longer. Since I have grown deaf, I hear them all the time."

"Can you still see across your island?"

"Oh, yes, I can see much farther than that now. It becomes clearer every day, and I seem to see much that escaped me when my sight was good."

They laughed together, for Minot Alexander understood what he meant.

Jean Pilliod trudged away between the two

lines of thorny locusts that lined the path leading to the village, and Mr. Alexander found a comfortable slope on the edge of the bluff, where he might recline while waiting for the vespers. It was that time of the day when two-thirds of the earth lies in shadow. The sunlight seen in patches seemed even more brilliant than when falling in an unbroken flood upon the earth at midday. At this time, the light, no longer glaring, glows, wherever it touches, with a pure, soft brilliance. The shadow of the banks slowly extended across the river; the green of the island grew softer, deeper, and more alluring. All the light left the valley, except far down the river where it shone and sparkled like some radiant creature just poising for its flight.

Then from the village behind him came the first solemn peal of a bell, full and mellow, a deep and fitting voice for the twilight and the scene. As it floated over the river, it gave expression to the beauty everywhere, and brought him satisfaction and content. He closed his eyes and listened. A peaceful silence followed, and then came the answer from a bell across the river. It was only a

single note that reached him, dying with the spent breeze that bore it. It was faint and clear, and of so pure and sweet a tone, that it might have been struck from a bell in the belfries of fairyland. Again and again the deep voice behind him filled the air with its melody, and the faint reply fell from the silence that followed like a pearl of sound. When it was over, he remained for a moment watching the last of the light as it blazed on the point of the spire of the Church of Our Lady, standing near the bluff of the river in Perrysburg. When this had passed and twinkling lights began to appear in the village, he rose to leave. As he walked along the bank, he saw, close to the edge, the tall figure of a young priest. His arms were folded, his head was bowed. He was repeating a poem, but so softly that only the pleasant murmur of his voice could be heard. Mr. Alexander recognized Father L'Amora, the curate of the Church of Our Lady.

"Good evening," he said. The priest looked up and smiled.

"Do you just happen to be here," he said, "or have you also come on purpose?"

"I have walked all the way from the city,

twelve miles, to look at the island and the river, and to hear the bells."

"The strange thing is," replied the priest, "that your doing so should seem strange. To think that you alone from a city of a hundred thousand should have come!"

"But why are you here?" asked Mr. Alexander. "Do you find this view better than your own from Perrysburg?"

"When the wind is blowing from the east, I must come over here to get the full effect of the bells. I often wonder what need the church can have for its priests. These bells are the true ministers of religion."

He turned again to the view before him, and, stretching his arm toward the glowing, dark water of the river and shadowy island, added, as if forgetting the presence of another:—

"Oh, how can men live in the midst of such beauty and still do evil? Even here, there is suffering and want."

During the long walk home, Mr. Alexander thought, now and then, of these words of the priest, for they expressed something of his own reflections. The woman dying in her hut and the fate of the little girl troubled

him. It seemed to him that there, of all places, life should be joyous. The child with her flushed cheeks, her bright, expressive eyes, her sunny and sympathetic nature, haunted him. He could almost fancy that she was still walking by his side, her hand in his. He found himself smiling at the memory of some quaint observation she had made. He saw her in the midst of the fields, surrounded by the sunlight and the flowers, her hair stirring in the wind, and he thought:—

“I wish this little soul could be kept pure and untroubled and childlike; that this one life, at least, could be always joyous. She is a true human flower, a very blossom of that fertile island, fresh and lovely with the dew of the morning still upon it.”

When he reached the city, he went to his apartments at the club. He ate his dinner alone, as was his custom. When it was finished, he lighted his pipe and sat for a long time with the light turned low, thinking and smoking.

At last he took an envelope from the desk beside him and thoughtfully addressed it to

SISTER PELAGIA,
Mother Superior,
Convent of our Lady of Peace.

Then, taking some fine note paper from one of the drawers, he placed it carefully before him with something in his manner suggestive of a caress, and resting his head upon his hand, wrote the following letter:—

“DEAR BETTY: I have this day met with a little girl, a child of the fields. She is as fresh from the heart of nature as the tender pink and white anemones she was gathering. Her world has, so far, been bounded by the placid river that surrounds the island where she lives. The winds, the birds, the wild flowers, and a boy about her own age, as innocent as she, have been her play-mates.

“I write to you after several years, because I have again spent a happy day and my heart is again filled with the impulses, the dreams of youth and of hope, which, in me, must always belong to you.

“My own experience has taught me, and all that I see adds to the belief, that sensitive and affectionate beings, who alone might experience perfect happiness, are deprived of their birthright by the haphazard habits of the world—the carelessness of destiny which allows them to become entangled with the passions before they are wise enough to understand them. For such natures love is a flame that may either illuminate or consume the soul. It separated you and me and rendered our lives lonely and

desolate. It has brought to others even greater disasters. It is the greatest of all the dangers that threaten the innocent and the pure in heart. Those who are capable of love are exposed to its influence at an age when the civilization to which they are accountable is a vast mystery, a thing of unknown laws and customs. Love is as real as the world is strange. It is as foreign to the laws and customs of the world as their own souls. It is a master, also, that takes no account of any other needs of those whom it visits. It possesses the heart before the judgment is formed, while the mind is still ignorant of itself, when the fancy is still busy with its far-away flights, before the country close about us has been explored. We are then like young birds caught in a tempest. That which should be the source of our happiness becomes the cause of our disaster. If, thirty years ago, you and I had known ourselves or understood anything of life or the world, we would not have been separated by a misunderstanding which was significant only because of the intensity of the love that caused it. Perhaps you have found as great a joy in religion as love would have brought you. The church may be more to you than a home could have been. But I doubt it. As for me, I am lonely and my life is empty.

“ If I could, in some way, become a part of another life and be an instrument in its happiness, I might then find some satisfaction in my own. I fancy that if this child I found to-day could be surrounded by gentle and wise affection, her life freed from anxiety and filled with interest and simple pleasure, and her heart protected from the dangers of a too youthful passion, she would become a beautiful and a happy woman, a creature to delight in.

“I would like to try this experiment, but how can I, an old bachelor, undertake such a thing? A young child must feel a thousand needs that I would not understand. How could I secure an education for her without subjecting her to all that I would avoid? But my day’s adventure has been good for me if nothing more comes from it. I have been happy. I have had a pleasant dream. Hope has revisited my heart for a moment at least, and I have once more been able to talk to you.”

As Hilda was running from her trouble at the departure of Mr. Alexander, she came upon the boy, who was busily carrying the loose stones from the water’s edge and laying them in rows on the summit of a little knoll.

She stopped abruptly when she saw him and watched him for a few moments in silence. Then she slowly approached and said, “What are you doing, Pierre?”

“I am building a city,” said the boy.

“Can I help you?” she asked wistfully; for although Pierre was gentle and affectionate toward her always, and glad when she joined him at his play, he seemed also to be perfectly happy alone, and she was never quite sure that he loved her or needed her until she had asked.

“Here is your palace,” he replied. “I made that first. You sit there and watch

me while I bring the stones. This is to be our own city where we will be Prince and Princess. Anything you want I will build for you."

He led her to the knoll, and they stepped over the wall of the city. Her palace was a little heap of rocks that he had arranged like a seat.

"How nice!" cried the girl as she looked proudly about and arranged herself, on the throne provided for her, as best she could, considering the shortness of her skirts and her lack of a purple robe.

How she wished and wished and wished that her dress were long and full and flowing!

In fact, she wished so hard for this that the good fairy who attends to the wishes of children heard and, behold! presently, as she sat upon her throne in the midst of the fields, her short gown of patched cambric was changed into a trailing robe of silk as green as the fresh grass at her feet. A cloak of purple velvet fell from her shoulders. A golden girdle was about her waist and, though she never once looked at her feet, she knew that the ugly, thick, black shoes with holes in the toes had been whisked away and

in their place had come two crimson slippers with satin bows, and silk stockings to match. She was very happy. She smiled contentedly upon Pierre, as he brought more stones, extending the long rows or building little heaps.

“Shall I sing to you,” she asked, “or shall I play for you upon my lute?”

“Come on,” said Pierre, joyfully, “we will run down to the marsh and make us each a lute.”

She jumped up from her throne and began to scamper away with him, at first forgetting the length of her green gown. When she remembered this, she stopped and, catching up the dragging train, fastened it with a jewelled clasp to her girdle. This done, she chased with all her might after Pierre.

When they reached the marsh, Pierre took off his shoes and stockings and splashing bravely through the wet grass and a little way into the water, gathered a handful of reeds and brought them to the land. These were quickly converted into perfect lutes, the kind that need neither knowledge nor experience to play, but which, when placed to the lips of children, send forth, of their own accord, those divine melodies and fantastic

airs that art and maturity, with their more conventional instruments, are forever trying to recall.

Slowly they returned, a long procession of knights and ladies, dwarfs and pages, falcons flying over-head, hounds straining at the leash, their steeds champing at the bits and dangling the golden chains of their trappings. This glorious cavalcade wound along the edge of the island and entered the city on the hill to the sound of the lute, just as the sunlight was lifting from the fields.

"Oh dear," said the girl as the green gown and purple cloak, the girdle, the slippers, and the stockings vanished with the sun, "I suppose I must go home."

"I am coming back here to-night," said the boy, "and be a watchman at the gate."

CHAPTER II

THE garden and greenhouses of Christopher Mott had once been on the outskirts of the city in a hollow near the old cemetery. The little enclosure still left to him was all that retained any likeness to the region as it was when he established himself there. The hills that had surrounded him had been levelled, and buildings had sprung from the meadows. The cemetery itself had disappeared, except a few graves in the immediate vicinity of a chapel still standing. All the rest had been removed a few miles further out, and on the property, stores and dwelling houses had been built. The chapel was never used, the graves about it were seldom visited, except by the curious or the idle. A tall iron fence separated it from the noisy, brazen world that drove its bargains and pursued its pleasures on either side.

In the old days when the open fields surrounded him and his nearest neighbours were

the silent people of the cemetery, Christopher Mott was as comfortable and prosperous as he wished to be. You might fancy that this encompassing of the great city about him would have made him rich. It was his ruin. The princes of nature have ever been the paupers of civilization. Christopher Mott was one of those human beings who seem to be related to the soil, not by their occupations alone, but by the ties of a natural and deep affection. He was not the slave of the earth, but its child. The creatures of his own garden were those younger members of his household left in his charge. When he looked over his fences or strolled occasionally through the fields, all that grew about him appealed to him as the more distant members of his family. He did not feel the sense of responsibility, nor the same degree of personal interest in them that he did in the plants of his garden, but his affection for them was of the same nature. He lived alone with his daughter. His wife, whom he had loved as happily as though she had been a geranium of his own raising, had died when Primrose was a child. Since her mother's death, Primrose had so completely

grown into her place, making the house always comfortable, working by her father's side in the garden and greenhouses, that old Christopher Mott really forgot that he had ever had any other mate than she. She looked like her mother, was quiet and cheerful and busy as she had been. In the old days his wife had stood every Sunday, from morning until night, in the summer-house, making prim bouquets of garden flowers for visitors at the cemetery. Now, thirty years later, he would sometimes look in the summer-house and see what might very well have been the same slender little woman, with the same sweet, homely, wrinkled face, making exactly the same kind of bouquets, stiff and uncompromising in form, but a gorgeous mixture of colours. No wonder he was a little confused as to her exact identity, for time passes on tiptoe by such as he. He did not realize that he, himself, was older than he had always been. The city grew about him. His three acres were enclosed by brick buildings. Trucks and delivery wagons constantly rumbled and clattered over the pavement past his gate. At first all this had been a great

trouble to him. As the years passed, he adapted himself to the new conditions. There was still quite a patch in the centre of his garden where such flowers as required sunlight would grow, and he utilized the borders for shrubs and vines and plants that would thrive in the shade. He planted ivy near the foundations of the buildings as they rose about him, and the walls, covered with the green leaves whose movements and whisperings he could understand, no longer annoyed him. He became accustomed to the cries of teamsters, the rumbling and clattering of their wagons, all the clamour of the street. It was some distance from him and was concealed by hydrangea, syringa, and lilac bushes. He could now sit on the porch of his cottage in the twilight and look upon his garden, or he could work over his beds all day, unconscious of the life and confusion about him.

When the city was still but an overgrown town, with homely tastes and manners, and he was the only florist, he was able to endure the demands of trade, for he could compel them to his own notions. His customers were all good housewives who cared for their plants with their own hands, and only came

to him now and then to secure some little addition to the family of geraniums, fuchsias, and begonias, dwelling comfortably, as he knew, in the sunny south window of the sitting-room. When such purchasers called, he could enjoy wandering through his green-houses with them, discussing the ailments of this mutual friend, and the best way of planting or pruning or making cuttings from that one. This kind of neighbourly accommodation was not commerce. He only sold what he could best spare, and he knew just where every plant he parted with was going, and the good care it would receive. If some upstart entered his premises, plainly ignorant of plants or considering them only as things for show, Mr. Christopher Mott had nothing to sell, and would hastily slip away, leaving the brisk purchaser alone with his astonishment or wrath. He had once been prevailed upon to rent out some hundred plants to a lady who was among the first to introduce formal receptions with decorations and light refreshments. The reception was on Saturday evening, and he did not get the plants back until Monday. The house was heated by a furnace, and the dry, hot air and rough handling had pro-

duced sad effects. The earth in the pots was hard and dry, and the blossoms and the leaves had been damaged. This offence was never repeated. More and more he learned to dread the sound of the gate as it opened, and when he heard feet upon his gravel walk, he would spy out upon the intruder, ready to disappear if he should look to be a mere purchaser.

The property increased to many times its original value. He could have sold it on frequent occasions and realized a comfortable fortune. When a place has once become a home to such a nature, it no longer has a price. The soul seems in some mysterious manner to be rooted there. Poverty, sickness, all manner of sorrows, and even death, will be endured more calmly than the thought of removing from that particular plot of ground, that one house which has become home, even though to move would bring relief. Christopher Mott saw the fields receding from him with regret. But he would rather sit in his accustomed place, surrounded as it was by a thousand enemies, and dream of the sights and sounds he loved, — the broad, open meadows, the distant line

of the woodland, the wind, the changing hues of the clouds, the birds, — than to follow them and fix his tabernacle in new places.

When men came to him with offers to buy, he was both indignant and alarmed. He did not listen to their terms. He could not have told if he had been offered one or a hundred times a thousand. He looked upon these offers as some threat, some treacherous and terrible design upon him. He was one of those who, much alone and silent, live in their feelings and their speculations, a life entirely independent of judgment. Their emotions are in no way influenced by what they know. If any one should ask this old eccentric why his taxes increased from year to year, he would answer that it was because the value of the land increased. But, at once forgetting this sane conclusion, he would still feel the same vague apprehension of the city and look upon its growing levy as a deliberate design to take his home from him.

It became more and more difficult to meet the necessary expenses. First, one of his glass houses and then another became dilapidated and was abandoned; for what with defective pipes, missing panes of glass, and widening

crevices, it was no longer possible to keep them warm in winter. The benches, as they decayed, could not be replaced, for lumber was much more expensive than it was once, and the stream of money that used to trickle naturally into the leather pool he called his purse, had for some reason ceased to flow. As these changes occurred, his habits also changed. Living always among his plants, he had become so familiar with them that all their habits and needs were as plain to him as his own. They were real beings that constantly needed his care and grew into his affections. His old plants were his old people, who sedately occupied their tubs and peacefully relied upon him for protection, sustenance, and the gratification of their increasing whims. His young plants were gay little beings, brought into the world with his assistance, ignorant of the thousand dangers awaiting them. How carefully he watched over them, giving them the sunlight, the shade, the water, the nourishment they needed, and taking every day a pleasure in their innocent enjoyment. He saw them grow, he noted how their little leaves laughed in the breeze and how their blossoms popped

open when he had planted them safely in the garden beds, and his heart grew tender toward them like that of a wise and watchful father as he sees the happiness of his rosy-cheeked children at their play.

For years he had done all this, noting many things that would escape most people. His knowledge was not made known, for he lived with these creatures as a member of a family and not as an observer with theories to exploit. The revelations that came to him constantly concerning the nature and ways of his plants were of absorbing interest to him because he loved them. It never occurred to him to make known what he learned. As the houses were abandoned and the labour of caring for the plants grew less, the conduct of the business, such as it was, fell gradually to Primrose, and he devoted himself more and more to the pursuit of special interests. He took some of the framework and glass from the abandoned houses and built for himself a small place in the midst of the garden, its glass sides exposed to the sun, where he could doctor his invalids and follow any experiment that might lead him.

Primrose had but one small house to attend to. This was heated by a stove at each end, and by a row of large lamps suspended down the centre. In this house was gathered all that her father had kept from his former stock. A century plant, two huge rubber trees, and a phoenix palm, an orange tree, two sicas, an oleander and an abutilon, all in monstrous tubs, that could scarcely be lifted by four men. These and some fifty other patriarchs, utterly worthless as commerce, occupied most of the space. They would stand there forever and bring not a penny for their keep, but to Christopher Mott they furnished the only real necessity for maintaining this remaining house. He still grew a small supply of young geraniums, fuchsias, and begonias, for a few old customers who maintained the south window families. Every fall Primrose made thousands of cuttings from salvia, sweet williams, petunias, mignonette, and verbenas for the next year's beds of these housewives, and for her father's garden. She sowed the seed of pansies, forget-me-nots, and daisies, in little pans, transplanted them in boxes, and finally placed them in rows about three inches

apart in the cold-frames between the green-houses and the kitchen. Her father was willing for her to sell such of these in the spring as he did not need, because he knew they would, of course, be bought only for the garden.

One day, however, as he was passing a grocery store, during one of his rare walks through the city, he saw a display of young pansy plants, primroses, and daisies, on the sidewalk. They were packed loosely into shallow boxes and left exposed to the dust drifting in from the street, the sweep of women's dresses, the sticks of small boys, and the insults of every dog that passed. The dirt about them was very dry. They drooped dejectedly. Blossoms hung in shreds from their wilted stocks, or, completely severed from them, blew to the walk and were crushed under foot. This was a horrible sight to Christopher Mott.

"How do I know," he thought, "but that such scoundrels as this grocer are among my customers?"

He returned hastily to his own neighbourhood and investigated for several blocks in all directions. Here and there he saw a simi-

lar unfeeling treatment of the young plants, and hurried home in great distress.

“Primrose,” he called, “Primrose,” as soon as the gate was closed behind him. It was some distance down a gravelled walk from the gate to the house. The garden spread in all directions. Here was a group of flower beds, here a patch of shrubs, there an arbour covered with grapevines or clematis, and there a clump of fruit trees. The only lawn was about these small orchards. The remainder of the ground was divided into flower and vegetable beds of all shapes and sizes. He looked here and there for Primrose. He found her in the greenhouse with a stranger. He had evidently bought a few plants that were standing in a little group by themselves, and was now concluding an arrangement with her.

“Of course,” he was saying, “it will be quite a trouble for you, and I will expect to pay for that; or I will have a messenger from the club call every morning for it, if you would prefer. That would cost me a quarter. If you would rather deliver it yourself, I will pay thirty-five cents.”

Christopher Mott had now joined them,

and was looking inquiringly from his daughter to the stranger.

"This gentleman," said Primrose, in reply to his look, "wishes me to send him a carnation every morning."

"May I ask your name?" said Mr. Mott, casting an anxious glance at the plants he was about to lose.

"Minot Alexander. I live at the City Club."

"Are these some plants you have selected?"

"Yes, I wanted a few for my room."

"Do you have furnace heat?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am afraid I can't spare these plants just now."

Mr. Alexander looked the astonishment he felt.

"The carnation, of course we could give you, but it is quite a distance to the club."

"I was just saying to your daughter that I would either send for it or pay thirty-five cents for it delivered."

"Oh, that is too much. You can get one for five cents at a store that has lately opened just opposite you."

"But I would rather buy of you," said Mr. Alexander. "The fact is, that I have often

walked by here just to look in upon your flower beds, and your arbours, and pretty cottage, and cool fruit orchard."

He did not add that the signs of distress about the place had at last prompted him to investigate. He began, however, to appreciate something of the true situation. The sympathy and interest awakened by the gentle manners and pleasant simplicity of Primrose was increased by the little glimpse he had caught of the curious character of her father.

"Of course," said Mr. Mott, doubtfully, "if you wish to send for it, I suppose you may."

"All right," replied Mr. Alexander, delighted by this concession. "And now about the plants?"

"That is out of the question. I really could not think of that. You see, they would not do well with furnace heat. I am afraid, if you are not accustomed to plants, they would last only a very short time, anyway."

"Then you don't sell to every one?"

"Oh, no. I must know they will be taken care of. I could not endure to think of my

plants when they leave me unless I am sure they are doing well."

This reminded him of the cause of his anxious return.

"Primrose," he asked eagerly, "do you sell anything to the grocers and storekeepers about here?"

"I have sold quite a good deal to them this spring," she replied.

"Heavens!" he cried, in considerable agitation. "You must never do it again. You don't know how they handle them. I have just seen thousands of young pansies covered with dust, torn and drooping, in dry dirt, with the sun blazing on them, dying for want of water and food."

Odd as was this appeal, Mr. Alexander was affected by it. Whatever he might think of the notions expressed, there was no doubt about the sincerity of the strange old fellow who held them. His distress was real. His devotion, his purity of heart, and unselfishness shone in his face. This was the first visit of Mr. Alexander, but in the years that followed he was a more and more frequent visitor. It became his custom to sit upon the porch with Mr. Mott and Primrose for an

hour or so summer evenings, quietly contemplating the garden, breathing in the sweet odours, and listening to the hum of the bees and insects that hovered here until the darkness came.

Poor Primrose had a sorry time of it in the effort to meet such expenses as were necessary. Fortunately, their table cost them very little, living, as they did, almost entirely on the vegetables and fruit they grew. Now and then she would have to speak to her father when some pressing need arose and there was no money to meet it. The first occasion of this sort occurred just after Mr. Alexander's first visit.

"Dear father," she said, "the taxes are due, and I have only a little of the amount. If I can't sell to the storekeepers, what will I do? They were my best customers."

He made no reply, but during the day he thought the matter over. The next morning he rose early, and going to the shed, brought forth a long push-cart that he used in his garden. This he loaded with crates of pansies, forget-me-nots, daisies, and sweet alyssum, and a few boxes of primroses in pots. He looked up at his daughter, who was stand-

ing in the kitchen door, smiled cheerily, and passed out upon the street with his load before him. All the morning he trudged through the streets, avoiding the teams, and paying no heed to those who hailed him in passing. He would not sell at hap-hazard. He stopped only at homes in the quiet residence streets. If the woman who came to the door pleased him, he would ask her a few pointed questions to convince himself that she knew a daisy from a dandelion, and, if all was satisfactory, he would offer her his wares in so persuasive a manner that he seldom failed to sell when he wished to. He left amused customers behind him, but carried with him a heart that was satisfied. He returned at night with empty boxes. This he repeated every day until he had placed in his daughter's hand the money she needed. After this, as often as Primrose came to him, he resorted to his push-cart and the streets. When, however, the season for planting out of doors was past, it was not so easy a task. It was more difficult to find customers, and, worse still, it was harder to make a selection to sell. The few hundred house plants he still had room for were dear to him. If he

made cuttings and grew young ones, by the time they were old enough to sell they were hard to part from. He made a whimsical and pathetic figure as he laboured over the filling of his cart. Fine, thrifty creatures, with gay blossoms, he was tempted to reject because of his pride in them and his fear of their misfortunes. It was like sending one's handsome, wayward daughters into a world where their very beauty and headstrong innocence would tempt disaster. The less shapely or defective plants he wished to keep with him in pity. It usually became necessary for him to call Primrose to his help, on some pretext or another. Then he would watch her, as it were, through half-closed senses while she hastily seized this plant and that,—the very ones, perhaps, that he had before placed upon the cart and removed.

At last, however, even the trade of the push-cart was not enough. The taxes increased, the house must be repaired, clothes that had been many times remade and mended were worn out.

There was a mortgage of three thousand dollars on the place, given to a loan com-

pany when the greenhouses were first built. It had been three years since the interest on this had been paid.

Matters came to a crisis one evening with a letter from the secretary of the loan company, informing him that something must be done at once or the mortgage would be foreclosed. The secretary appreciated the old florist much more than might be expected from so shrewd a man of business, and had stood between him and the company for over two years. There was to be a meeting of the directors on the following morning, and he knew that the Mott mortgage would be one of the matters looked into. The taxes for the half-year had not been met in December, and were still unpaid. This would be discovered by the directors, and unless he had something better to offer than persuasion or excuses, they would direct him to foreclose.

"I want to help you," the secretary wrote, "and you may be sure I will do my best. Come down in the morning early and talk it over. We may hit upon some plan, and even if we don't, I can at least tell my board that you have been to see me, and that we are trying to."

Primrose read this letter to her father and quietly resumed her sewing. He went into the garden and walked slowly up and down the paths, his hands behind him, his glance fixed upon the ground. The full moon was about an hour above the buildings and more than half the garden was flooded by its light. The dew sparkled like jewels on the tips of the crisp leaves of the plants he had that day set out. He walked over to see if they were comfortable. He stood for a while near his fruit trees, and it seemed to him that the mere stirring of the wind in their branches could not create the peculiar impression of an awakening life they gave to him.

“It must be,” he thought, “that the unfolding of the leaves, though I can neither hear nor see the process, is recognized by some sense I am unconscious of.”

This was a most important thought to him, and he stood for a long time near his trees, pondering, experimenting with himself, listening and examining closely. When he returned to the house he had forgotten the letter, nor did he think of it again until the next morning, when Primrose reminded him of it.

“You had better go down and see him,” she said. “I have grown a great many verbenas, petunias, and geraniums for this spring, and perhaps if we can pay them something, they will wait.”

“Yes, yes, I will go,” replied her father, cheerfully, for it was a warm, sunny morning.

He stood for a moment looking over his garden complacently, and then started briskly down the street toward the loan office. He had only gone a little way when he met Mr. Alexander, who stopped him, saying: “I was just going to you. What a wonderful spring this is. I was up the river yesterday and spent the whole day on Pilliod’s Island. Come, I must tell you about it.”

He began at the beginning, and at the mention of the strange pink flower he had tried to secure, Mr. Mott exclaimed: —

“Was it a sweet pogonia? Do you suppose it could be?”

“I don’t know what it is. I have never seen one like it before.”

“Was the blossom shaped something like a ladyslipper?”

“Yes, but it was a beautiful, clear pink.”

“Well, well,” said Mr. Mott, intensely interested. “I believe it was a sweet pogonia. That is one of the finest of the orchids, although it has never been talked of much. It is certainly very rare around here. I have never heard of one before, though it might very well grow here. I must certainly go up and see.”

“But, that is not all I found,” said Mr. Alexander. “I think I have discovered what I have wanted for many years, — a child that I can love and make happy.”

They walked on together without any conscious end in view, while Mr. Alexander described his day on the island, his experiences with the child, and his speculations concerning her.

“Why don’t you adopt her?” asked Mr. Mott, eagerly.

“I would like to. What do you think is necessary for a young girl’s happiness? I would certainly take her if her mother should die and I were sure to make her happy.”

“A nature that is simple and healthy,” replied Mr. Mott, “will be happy in the mere act of living. The truest life is the most natural one. Real happiness is a part of

healthy growth. I doubt any one can experience a greater happiness than that of a plum, if it is allowed to ripen and fall unmolested."

"That is the trouble," said Mr. Alexander. "Very few plums escape the worm or the greedy bird, the rough wind or the hand of the marauder. If I were to adopt this child, I would want her to grow into womanhood, learning to know herself, but ignorant of the world. If she could hold to her ideals until they were sufficient unto themselves, so that she would afterward judge all that she met by them, and not them by what she met, the world could not harm her. I would like to take her now while her heart and mind are free, before she has begun to love and to remember, and to give her an opportunity to mature, free from the dangers of idealizing some chance lover and making a hero of him. That is what ruins the lives of the fanciful and the affectionate."

"For my part," said Mr. Mott, "it seems to me very easy to be happy. Life is a wonderful thing. There is always some mystery just about to be revealed, some long-pondered question almost settled. Just last night a

marvellous possibility whispered to me as I stood in the moonlight by my fruit trees. I found myself suddenly listening to sounds I could not hear, looking at what I could not see. I am certain now that all my life I have been receiving impressions through mediums unnamed as yet by our philosophies. I often suddenly become conscious of a communication between unknown things and a being, perhaps many beings, within myself, equally unknown. Here is a mystery intense and alluring. I could never be dull with such a thought to pursue."

As they walked and talked, the last houses of the city were passed, and before they knew it they found themselves upon a country road. Now, by common consent, conversation ceased. They lifted their heads a little higher and looked silently far over the fields. They took long breaths, and a curious gleam of expectation lighted their eyes. They were hunters just entering upon familiar preserves; they were sailors, long penned inland, just headed for the sea; they were two faithful old courtiers in pursuit of an ancient coquette, ever young. They were, in fact, two lovers of

nature, who found themselves, unwittingly, just over the borderland of spring.

A bird, evidently the first real songster to have arrived, perched upon the fence near them, shook its feathers briskly, picked once or twice at its wing, tossed a gay, sweet song into the air, and flew swiftly away through the sunlight.

Here and there a tree or bush was bristling with tiny green points where the leaves were beginning to appear. The dull grey of the fields was giving way to the green of the new grass blades. They came to a bridge, and the warm, smooth tops of the stone supports tempted them. Here they sat, their old legs dangling over the stream, as happy as truants. So the hours passed. It was late in the afternoon when Christopher Mott, happy and hungry, reached home. As soon as he appeared, Primrose bestirred herself. He was tired with his long trudge, and was glad to drop into his rocker on the porch. The odour of carrots and turnips, and the sound of dried beef frizzling in hot butter in the frying-pan, came cheerily from the kitchen. He heard the oven door open and close and thought

perhaps there would be biscuit. And there were. It was as rare a dinner, in fact, as he had eaten in years.

"I have had a fine day," he said as he leaned back in his chair, almost satisfied, while Primrose poured his second cup of tea.

"I am glad," she said. "Did you manage everything all right with the loan company?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Mott, aghast. He knew well enough, but the remembrance of his neglected mission came so suddenly from such a complete and blissful forgetfulness, that he cried out as one might dodge a blow that has already been dealt.

"About the mortgage," replied Primrose, wondering what the trouble could be.

"I did not go," he said, in confusion, trying to recall just how he had come to forget.

"But, father," said the girl, anxiously, "I am afraid they will not wait any longer."

He noticed the distress in her eyes, and suddenly his own soul was plunged in misery. He was, all at once, without a moment's weighing of the matter, as sure of the loss of his place as if he were already torn from

it. A vision of the bedraggled and suffering plants he had seen exposed to the mercy of the streets appeared to him, and he imagined himself already in a similar plight. It was not poverty he feared. He did not think of that. He did not even consider that the place, if sold, would bring enough to establish him in luxurious quarters for life and give him an independent income. To leave his home, to see his trees cut down, his shrubs uprooted, his flower beds trampled upon and destroyed, would be his death. All his terror of the city returned to him. While he had been discoursing on the beauty of life with his friend, the tragedy of life had caught him by the coat tails. He rose from the table and went mechanically into the garden. He stood in the midst of his flowers, seeing nothing. His heart was full of fear.

CHAPTER III

FOR the first time in his life, Christopher Mott spent a sleepless night. Just before morning he fell into a doze, but at five o'clock, his hour for rising, he woke with a start. He lay quietly, for a moment, wondering what had happened. He seemed to be in a strange place. He could hardly distinguish the objects about him; they were vague of outline and unreal. His head hurt him and he wished to rub it, but his hand was too heavy to lift. "I must get up," he thought.

He again opened his eyes, and this time he was very much startled. It was about midnight. He could tell that by the stillness, by the tones of the ticking clock, by the look of the world through the window. A moment before, the pale light of the morning had been about him, and now it was night again. That was very strange. His head felt better, but he was weak. Perhaps he

was dreaming. He was certainly passing a very restless night. He would try and sleep and not dream. He heard a movement in the room, and his heart stood still. He listened and was sure that some one was near him. He turned his head slowly, silently, on the pillow and looked. He could distinguish a dim figure near the window. There was a man sitting in his rocker.

He tried to speak, but it was some time before he could hear himself say, "Who are you?"

His voice was too feeble. It could not be heard. He remembered now that he had tried to speak before in his dreams and no one heard him.

"I will sleep," he said, "and not dream."

He tried to recall what he had been so distressed about before going to bed. Then he remembered that it was because he could not make the young salvias and coleus he was planting stay in the ground. It had been terrible. As fast as he put them in their holes they popped out again. If by dint of great quickness and exertion he managed to finish a row, he would look back when the end was reached and see them all stretched upon the

ground, with every fibre of their roots shaken free from the moist dirt, dry and wilting in the sun. He shuddered again to think of it.

“But look,” said the wind in the cherry trees above him, for he was now standing in the cool shade of an orchard, “why do you worry? There are all your young plants standing upright and stiff. They are already fast rooted. You can see how fat with sap their stalks and stems are. And look at the branches of these cherry trees! Did you ever see such a mass of blossoms?”

He noticed then how fragrant was the air and how fresh and green the grass. He lay down under the blossoms and, closing his eyes, passed into a happy, dreamless sleep. When he awoke, the sun was shining brightly into his room. He was surprised to find himself in bed. He saw Primrose sitting by the window, sewing.

“How did I come to be here?” he asked.

“Oh, father,” cried Primrose, jumping from her chair. Then, as if recovering from a great surprise and as if remembering a part she had learned, she resumed her seat and began to rock and sew. “Have

you slept well?" she asked pleasantly, as if nothing had occurred.

"It must be very late," said her father, feebly, trying in vain to raise himself in bed. She put her sewing down quietly and went over to him. She pressed him gently back upon the pillow, kissed him, and stroked his hair.

"Don't worry about getting up," she said; "you are weak, and must be very quiet for a while yet."

"What is the trouble?" he asked anxiously. "Am I sick?"

"You are nearly well now," she said cheerfully. "The doctor says that in a few days more you will be better than ever."

"Has the doctor been here? I didn't know it." He remembered the man by the window in the night, and wondered if it were he.

"It was foolish of me," he said, partly to himself, "to go to sleep on the ground. How did you bring me in?"

Primrose was startled. She thought he must be still delirious.

"You must have dreamed that," she said.

"Perhaps I did. Of course I dreamed

it, for the cherry trees are not in blossom yet."

He closed his eyes, and Primrose, thinking he would again fall asleep, went noiselessly back to the window. But he was not sleeping. He said presently:—

"Primrose, what was I worried about last night? It could not have been about the verbenas and coleus—I must have dreamed that, too."

He laughed to himself at the thought of the queer tricks they had played on him.

"It is not even time to plant them yet."

"There is nothing to worry about," said Primrose. "All you need do is to be quiet and comfortable and get well."

Suddenly Mr. Mott opened his eyes wide and sniffed the air.

"What do I smell?" he asked eagerly. "It can't be cherry blossoms. And yet I surely smell them. Am I still dreaming? Tell me, Primrose."

Primrose looked out of the window a moment, and then coming again to the bedside said gently:—

"You are awake, father. The trees are in bloom. If you will just rest quietly and not

worry for a few days, you will be up and see them for yourself."

"How long have I been sick?"

"Almost two weeks."

"Almost two weeks?" he repeated. He lay for a long time with his eyes closed, while Primrose lightly rubbed his forehead and temples.

* * * * *

Mr. Alexander passed very little of his leisure in the general rooms of the club. He preferred a quiet evening with his books by his own lamp and table. In the company of his pipe and Sir Walter Scott he felt much more sociable and at home than with most of his acquaintances. Men thought him rather cold and reserved, but they held him in profound respect, for he was both honourable and rich.

"He knows how to make money," they said, "but his heart is a dried apple."

They did not hear him chuckle nor see the moisture in his eyes when alone up there in his room with his invisible companions.

The evening after his stroll into the country with Mr. Mott, he stopped for a few moments in the library of the club. This

room was called the library, and, in fact, there were a number of books in orderly rows, securely locked in richly decorated cases along one side of the room. The keys to these cases had been lost several years, but no one had missed them. It was a comfortable room, however, and the rack on which the daily papers hung was well patronized. When Mr. Alexander entered, two gentlemen were lounging comfortably in big leather chairs, reading their papers and smoking. They were Mr. Nathan and Mr. Alden, the one a director of the People's Loan Company, the other its secretary.

"Hello, Alexander," said Mr. Alden. "I see you were on the right side of the wheat excitement, as usual."

"Was I?" replied Mr. Alexander, indifferently. "I told my boys to buy this morning."

He looked over the other's shoulders and saw a long report of the day's doings on 'Change. He was reported as among the heavy operators and his profits were enormous.

"It was a good day for you," said Mr. Nathan, pleasantly.

"Indeed, it was," replied Mr. Alexander. "I spent it along a country road with my old friend Mott. I wonder that they don't adjourn the board for a few weeks in the spring. I will propose it to-morrow." He indulged in a grim smile at the thought of the reception such a proposal would receive.

"That Mott," said Mr. Alden, "is a queer fellow. I don't understand him. He has always pretended to me that he would not part with that place of his at any price. But from what you say I should judge our foreclosure of his mortgage has worried me more than it has him."

"How is that?" said Mr. Alexander, very much interested.

"Oh, we have held a mortgage against him for twenty years and foreclosed it to-day."

"Does he know it? How much is the mortgage?"

"Three thousand. It don't amount to anything on that place, of course, but he has seemed so anxious to keep it, and convinced me at least that he could not pay, that I have tried my best for two years to hold things off. I wrote to him yesterday to come and

see me, but I begin to think I could have spared my pains."

"Do you know," said Mr. Alexander, uneasily, "that I believe he was on his way to see you when I met him, and that he forgot his errand?"

"Well, well," laughed Mr. Alden, "that would be just like him. If that is so, however, it can't distress him much."

"I don't know about that."

"Well, I'll tell you what I think about Mott," said Mr. Nathan. "He is a crazy fool, and I can't see for the life of me why we put up with him as long as we did. You can't run a loan company on sentiment, I tell you."

Mr. Nathan was a self-made man who had spent thirty years in an active, unceasing effort to get rich, and had succeeded. He was now nearly fifty, and could look from the window where he sat and contemplate the tall, solid evidence of his wealth and energy in the form of a few of the buildings he owned. He was not thinking of them, however; these were now only half-forgotten achievements, more of a care, in fact, than a pleasure. His mind's eye was fixed eagerly upon other and taller buildings he hoped yet to possess.

“What good is a man like Mott in the world?” said he. “That land of his remains an eyesore in the middle of the city. I tried to buy it of him five years ago for a tin can factory, and you would have thought I was trying to steal it by the way he treated me. It’s a good thing for others when such fellows go under. There is no progress with them in the way.”

Mr. Alexander looked at the speaker through half-closed eyes.

“Alden,” he said, after a little pause, “just hold that proceeding over for a day or two. I’ll guarantee that the mortgage will be paid or renewed and the interest all met in good order.”

He went up to his own room, read a few chapters in “Old Mortality,” and went to bed.

The next afternoon he walked out to Mr. Mott’s. Primrose, pale and anxious, met him at the door.

“He is very sick,” she said. “He is unconscious.”

Mr. Alexander, alarmed, waited to see the doctor, who was then in the sick chamber.

“It is brain fever,” said the doctor. “He

is old, and it will go hard with him; but he is well seasoned and strong for his years, and will come through all right."

"What was it, Primrose?" asked Mr. Alexander, as he took her hand and led her to the bench on the porch.

"We will lose this place and it will kill him. I don't know why he failed to go to the Loan Company yesterday. It might not have done any good, for they have lost patience; but, of course, there is no hope now."

"Primrose, let me talk with you about this frankly. Do you know that this place is worth a fortune? Its value only makes it expensive for your father and you because you can make no use of it; but if you sold it, you could pay off all you owe and never want for anything again."

"I don't believe my father would know what you meant by that."

"Perhaps not, but if the thing were done, and he should find himself with a beautiful little house, with another few acres around it, where he could work and experiment as he does here, he would grow used to it, and you, Primrose, don't you understand that your life would be different?"

“How would it be changed?”

“If you had a little fortune in securities, with a good interest coming to you regularly, you would not need to work as you do now, but could fix up your house handsomely, make fine friends, visit and travel and entertain. You could have beautiful dresses and more lovers than you would know what to do with.”

Primrose laughed in spite of her anxiety, but though she assured him that she knew how plain and unattractive she was, and that no amount of ornament could make her beautiful, she looked wistfully down the garden paths as she spoke, as if half hoping for some long-expected one.

“Perhaps you do not care for lovers?” he asked.

“Oh, I would not want many,” she answered, a little confused, and yet a little pleased, half-nervous and half-amused. “What I would like is impossible.”

“And what is that, Primrose?”

“A lover, young and handsome, romantic and noble, who would come to me just as I am, and worship me and think me the most beautiful woman in the world.”

“Have you never loved any one, then, nor had a lover?”

“Do you think I would tell you that?” she answered.

He smiled and took her hand.

“Then you are not tempted by an investment, fine dresses, and the world?”

“Not the world as it really is,” she said. “I love to take journeys and wear very gay costumes, and I am constantly doing so. You have no idea where these gravel walks can take you on a fine afternoon or a bright summer night. And I often discover the most wonderful people in our arbours. It will not distress me, of course, as much as it will my father, but when I go from here it will be like leaving a lovely world that has grown used to me and given me place, that knows me for what I hope and fancy, and going into a world that is strange and indifferent. You think my father would grow used to the change? He never would. I doubt if he would make it. It is the familiarity, the friendliness of the things about him that keeps youth in his old body. He could not really be old. If he were to begin to grieve and think of his age, and realize that the

associations of his life were over, he would die at once, as a pod, when it is picked and emptied, dries and is blown away."

"Primrose," said Mr. Alexander, patting her hand, "I will buy this mortgage and will hold it without interest. But I would rather your father did not know it. I may wish to ask a favour of him some day and I want him to be free."

And so, when Mr. Mott, after his two weeks' illness, sitting in his rocker by the window, looking again over his garden now green and blooming, remembered the danger that menaced him, he was quickly reassured by Primrose.

"That was all a foolish mistake," she said, lying complacently; "they will never trouble us again. It was all explained and settled the very next day, but you could not know it then. They are so secure, you see, that it doesn't matter if we never pay them."

This seemed like perfectly good logic to Mr. Mott, and he was contented and happy. He looked over his beds and his arbours and orchards, planning how to improve them.

"I think," he said, "I will take down those poor, tattered houses. They are only ex-

posed to the weather as they are, and I cannot repair them."

"We can take the room they occupy," said Primrose, "for flower and vegetable beds, and use all this space between the cottage and the flats for lawns and shrubbery. I would like a bower in the midst of it, with a little fountain near it, and enclosed with syringa bushes and hydrangeas."

All her life Primrose had dreamed of such a bower, in the midst of a smooth, green lawn, shut away by flowering shrubs and lightly shaded by a few graceful trees, where she could hold occasional receptions for the delightful people she was always meeting in her rambles along the extending gravel paths.

One day, during Mr. Mott's convalescence, Mr. Alexander was sitting with him on the porch.

"When I am strong again," said Mr. Mott, "I will remove those houses that are falling down. I wish I were well, for I am impatient to get at my garden. There are a hundred things I have planned to do while sitting here."

"It is very beautiful as it is," said Mr. Alexander.

“You will see what a paradise I will make of it when I am strong again. All that patch over there I will sod with white clover turf. I will plant a little group of four elms. There will be a fountain in the centre, from which a little stream will run through the grass. I will cut a narrow way for it in the sod, and line it with pebbles. Near the fountain I will build a summer-house and cover it with climbing roses. All this will be enclosed with flowering shrubs, and will be our drawing room. Then, when you come for the afternoon, we can sit in the summer-house and listen to the cool sound of the water. Perhaps Primrose will read one of your books for us, or Father L’Amora will tell us one of his stories. In the evening we can stretch ourselves on the grass, when there is no dew, and look up at the stars.”

“How much easier you could do all that,” said Mr. Alexander, “if you had money, and could hire a few good men to help you.”

“I have never understood how to get money,” said Mr. Mott, with a quaint smile. “But I have never missed it much.”

“My friend,” said Mr. Alexander, “I would like to see those things done that you describe,

and all the affairs of this pleasant haunt of mine running as merrily as the little brook you will make. I am to enjoy these delights with you, and will help to realize them speedily. If you will let me manage your affairs, you will have, without bothering about it, what money you need."

"How is that?"

"I will invest five thousand dollars for you."

"But I haven't five thousand dollars," said Mr. Mott, with the greatest surprise.

"I will lend it to you."

Mr. Mott looked at his friend a moment, wondering. He then asked in all seriousness, "But would that be quite business-like?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mr. Alexander, gravely; "you can give me a second mortgage on this property, which will be good security. Anybody will tell you that."

Entirely reassured by his manner, Mr. Mott complacently agreed. The next afternoon, Mr. Alexander came with a lawyer. The mortgage was drawn, read over to Mr. Mott, who listened with the elaborate attention of total incomprehension, interrupting

now and then to inform Mr. Alexander and the lawyer of some new detail of the little eden he was preparing, which had come to him overnight.

They told him where to sign, and Primrose brought his spectacles, which he carefully polished and adjusted with the rare dignity that came to him on great occasions. He fixed his attention upon the paper long enough to write his name.

He now felt himself intimately connected with those vast and mysterious influences which control the world, and the simple, unquestioning confidence he felt in his friend made him able, for the first time, to think of them without terror. Even the lawyer seemed to be a pleasant, companionable sort of man, and when Primrose brought to them each a cup of her delicious tea, Mr. Mott leaned comfortably back in his chair, reveling in the novel delights which his venture in business had brought him.

A new existence began for Mr. Mott and Primrose. It was at first difficult for them to make use of their money. Mr. Alexander himself was constantly obliged to suggest to them ways in which it could be spent. Mr.

Mott now began to think of the great city about him with a friendliness, which more and more grew into a positive affection. It took for him the character of its representative, Mr. Alexander. He could never get over his surprise in the fact that the money he used, which seemed very large to him, did not exhaust the supply. The greenhouses were removed, and workmen had already begun to lay the sod before Mr. Mott had himself been able to take any active part in the labour. He had directed the work from his chair on the porch, where, every evening, Mr. Alexander joined him to watch the proceedings.

One day Mr. Alexander took the mortgage from his pocket and laid it on Mr. Mott's knee.

"You may destroy that now," said he. "It has been paid from your profits."

"It is wonderful," said Mr. Mott. "I would like to know how you did it."

"It is easy enough to make money," replied his friend. "The problem lies in knowing what to do with it, so that it will become a pleasure instead of a burden. It tempts men to its pursuit with great promises,

which it seems to forget as soon as it is gained.”

* * * * *

During these weeks Mr. Alexander had often thought of his day on Pilliod's Island, and the child. He had intended to see her again before this, to find some way, if possible, of helping her mother. Mr. Mott and his affairs had occupied his leisure, however, and this other interest had been allowed to drift. He had almost forgotten the matter, when he received this answer to his letter to Mother Pelagia:—

“MY FRIEND: I have been so long in writing to you, because at first I was in great trouble over your letter. To answer you in sympathy with your own feelings would be to hearken to voices in my heart long since silenced by prayer and penance.

“The ‘Betty’ you once knew should be forgotten by us both, and yet I am afraid she will not be altogether still. Ever since our convent postman rode in, bringing your letter to me, this same old Betty has been following me everywhere, whispering so loudly I feared she would be overheard. She has never left me, going even to mass, refusing to kneel, and even tempting me to snap a little holy water on one of the sisters who met me at the font in the chapel. I tell you this that you may see how wise it was to suppress so incorrigible a creature as this Betty.

“Dear friend, believe me when I say that, lonely as

you are, it is far better for both you and me that we were so early separated. In such a nature as yours only the virtues grow, and so I know that I have become for you a far nobler woman than I could have been had I remained with you in the world. Betty in my hands would ever have been a vain and malicious vixen, delighting in the torture of those who loved her. Abandoned by me, and left wholly to the protection and guidance of your tenderness and charity, she has become all that is gracious and womanly.

“You doubt if religion has brought me as great a joy as would love, or if the church is as much to me as a home would have been. I doubt if either love or religion can bring joy to such a nature as mine. But I do know that the church has brought me to an understanding of myself and made me of some use in the world.

“Here in our little convent world there is nothing to encourage the kind of vanity that was mine. It required years of humble service and the most unbending discipline to conquer the worthless pride and petty desires that once controlled me. But during all those years, even while I was still wilful and restless at heart, the solemn chapel bells, and the bells that tinkle their messages and their appeals from hour to hour, were speaking to me of holy and peaceful things. The sisters coming and going on missions of love and mercy were the only mediums between me and the world of men. The paintings and books about me spoke only of those who were seeking the ideal. Here in the midst of these beautiful woods and fair lawns, in this temple dedicated to Our Lady of Peace, there seemed to be no evil except what my own stubborn heart contained. I became ashamed and peni-

tent. Now that the years have passed and my life is nearly over, I find myself in authority — the mother of a divine household. I know how solemn, how tender, and potent are the influences at work here, for they have given me a soul. When I think, then, that I am now their mouth-piece, the medium through which they must reach others, I am filled with a wonder that is well-nigh fear. To be free from earthly passions, to empty my life of all personal desires, to listen only to these holy voices, and repeat their counsels and direct the life of this household in harmony with them, — this is my duty. Do you think if this does not bring me joy, that love would ?

“I hope you will see the child you speak of again. Although you said very little of her, I seemed to see her as clearly as if I had been with you. Why don't you give your fancy a reality ? If you will take her for your own and will trust her to me, I will make a place for her here in our school. The education she will receive cannot be excelled, and the very beauty of our gardens and groves, the innocence and simplicity of the life here, the gentle natures of those who will instruct her, can influence her only toward the ideals you wish her to possess. I believe that such an interest as this charge would bring you, is all that your noble heart needs to fill your life with happiness. Do this and let me help you. I will watch over her for her sake, for yours, and for my own.”

CHAPTER IV

LITTLE Hilda, having so much of the care of the household put upon her while so young, had learned many things that children seldom know. Before she was seven years old she could tell the time by the round wooden clock on the wall. She was a very busy and contented little housewife. There were many days when her mother did not leave her bed. Hilda was up with the sun to help her father with the breakfast. She knew how to make corn bread, could boil or fry or poach eggs, and was now learning how to make an omelet. Corn meal they always had, for Jean Pilliod saw to this. There were times in the winter when corn meal and potatoes were their only food. But in summer, a little vegetable garden supplied them with carrots, parsnips, turnips, onions, and beets. Jean Pilliod allowed them, also, all the eggs that were laid in the haystack and grassy hollows near their hut. Hilda

learned to care for the garden, to cook the meals, to sweep with a little broom, to wash up the dishes and put things to rights. All this kept her busy. Light-hearted and happy as she was, her childish fancy converted these tasks into a form of play. Every vegetable of the garden had its name to her. She would chatter to the dishes as she washed them and imagine that the meal she was preparing was the wedding feast of her favourite daughter Alice, a poor little apple-faced creature with one arm pulled off and a wide crack in one of her glossy china cheeks. This wonderful wedding had been taking place for so long and so many amazing features had been added each time, that the occasion had become a magnificent affair.

Amid what fantastic scenes do children move! It would be interesting to know at what age these images of feasts and festivals begin to form. We pass so unconsciously through this glorious period into the humdrum world of real men that no record has ever been kept, and the prattling of babes astonishes us. A word or a look escapes them and we dimly realize that they are dwelling in another world than ours.

This feeling of surprise is not softened by memory with most of us, for we have forgotten the fairyland of childhood.

Hilda's mother had once been able to repeat to her the songs and stories of her own girlhood. She had taken her part in all the merry, active life of the child. Now that she could hardly leave her chair during her best days, and was more and more frequently confined to her bed, the heartsickness she felt was not for her own pains and weakness, but for the dread of her little daughter's loneliness. Hilda, however, with the ease of a child was able to turn even this misfortune into a means of delight. The mother did her part in the mere desire that her suffering should not become a shadow on her child's life. True love is the wisest of all teachers, for it opens the ears of the soul to the voices of nature. There is nothing more natural than joyous industry. A loving mother will rear good housewives as a faithful duck a brood that can swim. No one who has not experienced and remembered it can know with what pride Hilda did the work of the house. She felt an almost delicious ecstasy in the knowledge that her mother

was helpless and dependent on her. One of the village doctors, paid by the town to look after the poor, came now and then and left medicine. One day when he was giving his instructions to the invalid, Hilda said a little shyly, but with determination in her voice, "Why don't you tell me, doctor, what to do? I am taking care of mamma, now."

The doctor and the mother smiled, but after this she was told, and the doctor soon learned that he could well trust her. Once he taught her how to feel the pulse and let her hold his big silver watch in her hand while she counted. She was too much excited to notice either the time or the pulse, but she counted over and over, as fast as she could, from one to twelve, for this was all she knew.

"A little girl like you," said the doctor, "ought to count a hundred at least."

She became silent at once and moved a little way from him. There she stood, glad to be forgotten in her shame, until he left.

"Mamma," she whispered, coming close to the bed, "please teach me to a hundred."

In a few days she had learned this lesson, for she studied it in all she did. She counted

the dishes as she washed them, the strokes of her broom as she swept, and her mother, listening from her bed, would correct her. When the work inside was done, she would go to the garden if her mother was able to sit in the doorway, or, if not, she would sit by her side and play with dolls or sing her to sleep or pretend to be the doctor and count her pulse. This she learned to do accurately.

Her father came and went, almost unnoticed. He seldom spoke when he was there, but sat in his chair, smoking and looking stupidly at his boots. He was forgotten when he was away. Sometimes he frightened her a little when he came home in the night, laughing and talking to himself.

Alone with her mother, she was, from sunrise until three o'clock, a happy, busy little housebody, with seemingly no desire unsatisfied. In the afternoon, when the round-faced clock struck three, she would listen a moment, counting the strokes, her head held as a robin's when it notes a sound. She would drop her little hoe in the garden, or her dolls upon the floor, and, running to her mother, cry eagerly, "I must go now, mamma. It is

three o'clock. Oh, I must hurry and meet Pierre."

There had never been any opposition to this. Hilda's joy was her mother's. The invalid never thought herself deserted. She would close her eyes and listen, in fancy, to her child's voice, and follow her, running over the fields. Sometimes the whim of the children brought them near the hut, and she caught the gust of their passing. Sometimes they tunnelled in the haystack not far away, or played on the shore where she could watch them, from her bed, through the window. Perhaps Hilda would run to her with a flower or a pretty stone she had found, or bring for her compassion a grasshopper with a broken leg, a bird that had fallen from its nest. She never thought of asking the children to stay near her. When she heard their voices approaching or saw them come into her view, her eyes grew moist with happiness. She felt that God wished in this way to be good to her.

Hilda, when she left the hut at three, would run down the long, grassy road that divided the fields, to the other end of the island near Maumee. Here she would sit on

a stone under a great willow tree and watch the crest of the bluff at the point where the path downward began. The stream was quite narrow here, and very still, except in the early spring, so Pierre could safely push himself across on his way to and from school, in a little flatboat built for his use. Hilda would sit quietly and watch until Pierre appeared, his books under his arm. If he stood, as he sometimes did, for a long time on the line, looking over the island and far away, not seeing her at all, or, if he only smiled at her and came quietly down the path to his boat, she remained seated on her stone, watching him in silence. If he looked toward her at once, as he more often did, and waved his hand or shouted, or came hurrying down the hill, she would jump to her feet and laugh and call to him. She was instantly alive to a thousand things they would soon be doing, and could not stand still while he pushed across. It was not that she was happier when Pierre was gay. She loved the quiet afternoons when he wished only to lie in the grass and watch the clouds form and float and dissolve. She loved to romp over the fields, to hunt for pretty

stones and explore the jungles, to build cities and palaces, or dig mysterious caves in the haystack, as well. It was all one to her, so long as she was with Pierre. Of course there was no conscious design on her part. It was as natural for her to reflect his mood as it is for the moon flower to increase in yellow with the fulness of the moon.

Alone, Hilda was contented with the things about her. She could tie an apron to her bed-post and put a bonnet on its knob and believe here was a pleasant companion for a day. She talked to the bushes, made princesses and gay maids-in-waiting out of rags. Whenever she looked at the frying-pan, it had a good word for her. If a bird alighted near her, she was glad to be agreeable while it chose to stay, but she felt no regret when it flew.

With Pierre she caught something of his spirit. Distance was the magnet of his soul. Sometimes, he, too, would delight in the things at hand, but it was only because he was able for the moment to imagine himself in some far-off place. All the delight of a fabulous world lay for him just beyond the

line of his vision. He was very stupid in school, and seemed to his teacher to learn nothing. There were, however, certain names in his geography and certain pictures that were far more real to him than Maumee or Perrysburg. Madagascar, Constantinople, Andalusia — these were the world. He had no thought of distance. Everything he longed for was just beyond the horizon. The outlines of the great city down the river were the turrets and round temple domes of Constantinople. Madagascar was just back of the faint line of woods across the river to the east. He could not have described any of these places. They were only wonderful, vague, glittering, musical, full of colour and delight. They were like the sounds of their names. It was to these places the clouds were bound, and here the birds went when they flew away. He would sometimes lie quietly, so far as his body was concerned, watching this constant flight of birds, feeling the wind as it hurried past him, dreaming of the things they saw and heard, and Hilda, sitting as quietly beside him, felt all the time, without knowing it, that he longed for something. Then he would jump from the ground

and run swiftly across the fields in pursuit of a cloud or a bird, and she, hurrying after him, hoped with all the passion of her heart that they would get what he was after. But they never did. Never. Pierre must always stop at the edge of the island while the clouds moved steadily on and the birds vanished. There was always the desire in Pierre's soul to make friends with these pilgrims from his promised lands. He could never see a bird on a limb near him without wishing to hold it, to stroke its soft throat. Sometimes he would follow a loiterer from bush to bush, his hand held out, trying to calm its fears, reasoning, pleading, urging countless assurances of tenderness and good faith. Hilda, following close behind, would almost weep in her wish for his success. Her lips would tremble as she murmured plaintively: —

“Oh, good, dear birdie, won't you come? He wants you so. He wants you so.”

Sometimes, when Pierre was in his boat, coming home, he would look around the end of the island, across the wide river on the other side, toward the distant woods, and wonder if he would ever dare to go there. He had been to the city once, but that was

long ago and he only knew he had been. He had a vague recollection of tall buildings and many sounds — of thousands upon thousands of marvellous things to be seen if he could be there once alone and not have to hurry past them and keep still. He knew that if he only dared, he could float there in his boat. It rather frightened him to think of it, and yet he wished that sometime he might have the courage to run away.

When he spoke of such projects to Hilda, she was filled with awe at his audacity and terror at the idea of going. Of course, if he went, she would be obliged to. She did not dread the city so much as the forest, for it was in that direction the ogre lived. His great brick house could be seen near the edge of the woods.

After her day with Mr. Alexander, this fear of the ogre grew less until it vanished. In some way, her memory of him and her thoughts of the ogre became confused. At last she came to think of them as one, and she often wished that he would visit her again. It was still a terrible thought to her, this venturing away into unknown places, but she sometimes wished to explore the myste-

ries of his castle. She fancied herself and Pierre pounding on the big door with a stick, and trembled. Then when the ogre opened it and smiled, as he had when he frightened her before, she ran straight to him and was no longer afraid. He took them into a room filled with birds, and one with a great glass tank full of glittering fish. There was a long hall with high windows, a place of sunlight and mirrors and of great content. Here were countless dolls that laughed and talked, their voices like little bells. They walked up and down with funny, mincing steps, and bowed and scraped to each other very courteously. This lively scene would always terminate in a great dance, after which a feast was served in a dining room built entirely of glass, and it was very dazzling with all the lights ablaze. When she could eat no more, she helped the army of doll servants clear up the tables and wash the dishes, because the ogre had once said that he wished he had some one to do things for him. Then, being very tired, she climbed on the ogre's knee and went to sleep.

This visit came to be very real to her, for she generally thought it all out at least once, whenever she was with Pierre and he was

quiet. So now when he spoke of the journey she was not so much afraid.

One day when Pierre appeared on the hill on his way from school, he looked for some time in the direction of the woods. He came slowly down the path and pushed across to the island. He did not get out, but stood with the pole in his hands. There was an unusual colour in his cheeks and a new light in his eyes.

“Hilda,” he said, looking toward the little girl still waiting patiently on her stone, “I am going.”

She had felt what was coming when he began to speak. A shudder of fear passed over her. She gave a little gasp and looked helplessly about her. He put the pole in the water and pushed a little way from shore. She jumped excitedly from her stone and called, —

“Wait, wait, Pierre !”

She put her hand to her mouth and tried not to cry. She was always ashamed to do that. Pierre instantly pushed back, and she almost tumbled into the boat in her eagerness.

It was so great and solemn an occasion

that not a word was said. Hilda, crouched in one end of the boat, held to the sides as if for her life. Her eyes were riveted at first on Pierre, who stood at the other end, pushing steadily away from shore. They came out from between the mainland and the island, and soon the expanse of broad river lay before them. The shore on the other side seemed miles away. Hilda looked toward it once and knew that they were lost. She cast another terrified glance at the surging ripples around her and shut her eyes. After a long, long time of dread, she felt the boat grate on shore and opened her eyes with a start.

“Here’s an island,” said Pierre. “Let’s explore it first.”

“Oh, yes!” cried Hilda, shouting her joy at their escape. “What a be-u-tiful place!”

It was, in fact, a small pebbly knoll that rose out of the water. A handful of grass grew in the centre. To Pierre, however, it was an unknown country in the midst of the Mediterranean. The clump of grass was a jungle filled with friendly wild beasts, and strange hordes of kind and terrible savages lurked in the mountains. Here was a ver-

dant island, unknown to white men, which he would now claim for his own. To Hilda it was not only all this, because Pierre said so, — it was salvation. Had she been twenty years older, she would have wept and prayed in her thanksgiving. As it was, she whooped like a little Indian and hoped that Pierre would be satisfied with this for his journey. For the time, at least, he was content. There were other islands near, and the afternoon passed before they were all explored. Hilda grew used to the boat and the water and the distance from shore and began to enjoy her adventure.

“I wish we could stay here all night,” said Pierre.

“Would you dare?” asked the girl, glad in her heart that they could not and yet vaguely influenced by the other’s desire.

“Of course,” said Pierre. “I am king here, I guess, and I would stay, too, if they’d let me.”

By “they” he referred to his father and mother, two very disagreeable people who were forever in his way.

As Pierre was still struggling with the unhappy conviction that he must go home,

a flock of blackbirds came out of the west toward him. He watched them as they approached and his heart bounded with a wild hope.

“Lie down, Hilda,” he cried, throwing himself flat upon the pebbles; “perhaps they are coming here.”

Instantly the girl was by his side, looking upward as eagerly as he. We must call this host of winged beings blackbirds because there is no name for what they really were. If you would know how these children felt as they sprawled upon the earth, gazing with beating hearts and breathless, you must see what they saw, — not a flock of those greedy pests of the grain fields, but a company of the freebooters of the air, wandering knights-errant from enchanted lands, mysterious, beautiful, wise with the wisdom children seek. To such boys as Pierre, birds appeal more than all other living beings, because for them they represent an active and boundless liberty. The captive wild fowl is not more desolate as he follows the flight of his kind, than was the soul of Pierre as he watched the birds speeding in their freedom. There was no limit to their powers, no hand

nor force to detain them. They sometimes cocked knowing eyes on him, but never spoke. He seemed to feel that if he could once gather some of these all-wise beings about him and establish an understanding that he could win their secrets and become free as they.

Pierre's excitement vanished as the birds passed overhead without noticing him. He stood up and watched them sadly. He heard the whir of their wings and the sound of their pleasant converse. How swiftly they passed! A few moments and they were like a tiny black cloud that dissolved just over the woods in the distance.

"Come on, Hilda, let's go," he said gloomily, getting into his boat. He looked now upon his new possessions and saw them as they were — just a few bare knolls.

As the children moved quietly homeward, the Angelus echoed between the neighbouring villages, and Pierre rested on his pole to listen. He was not conscious of the sound nor of his act. When it was over, he could not have told you that the bells had spoken. But Hilda, sitting now calmly in her end of the boat, saw the gloom lift from his face,

and she was glad again. Of course, she did not know it was in any way due to the bells, for she was as heedless of their sound as he. She laughed when a fish leaped from the water near her, and was not frightened when, leaning over to look, the boat tipped with her.

"Pierre," she said, "do you think if we drowned, we would be fishes?"

When Pierre pulled the boat on shore he had decided upon two things. He would go swimming that night, and very soon, perhaps the next day, he would start off on his long journey. These two fine things to do put him in gay spirits, and he raced hand-in-hand with Hilda down the island road.

That evening, as Hilda was sitting on the door-sill, singing softly to herself a little greeting of her own to the stars as they appeared, Pierre came to her and said, —

"I am going swimming."

"Oh," she exclaimed, at once forgetting her song and the stars, "I want to go, too."

It was the first swim of the year, and no calamity could be so great as the missing of it. She ran at once to her mother for consent. The poor invalid was so weak that she scarcely heard. But, suffering as she

was, she could still understand the eagerness of her child's desire and was more troubled by it than her own distress.

"Must you go to-night?" she asked as brightly as she could. "Dear little daughter, don't go to-night. Perhaps in a few days I can go and sit near you."

Hilda returned slowly to the door and said ruefully, "I can't go."

"I'll wait for you, then," said Pierre.

Nothing in all the world could have brought to Hilda so much joy as this. Pierre, in all the time they had been together, had never been unkind or thoughtless toward her. But there was something in his way of announcing his designs, in his quiet air of self-sufficiency and spirit of abstraction, that made Hilda a little in awe of him. She could never be sure that she was included in his plans, and every revelation of the fact that she was, brought her a new delight. The sacrifice that he now made was so great and he made it so willingly, that her little listening heart caught the first faint note of the song that must one day fill it. She was so happy that her lips trembled — a rare expression of joy with her.

She sat down by Pierre on the doorstep and tried to think of something that would please him. She began to feel, however, very soon, that he was busy with his own thoughts, and she sat contented and silent beside him.

She followed his gaze down the river and watched, with something of his own feeling, the play of lights above the city. Above and around them was the dark night. Down there the sky was aglow. Night after night Pierre had seen this shining cloud of promise. He listened to the wind in the trees and bushes without thinking of it as the wind. It was a voice whispering of the wonders of that region beneath the glowing sky. He saw the reflection of the stars upon the ripples, and it was for him a fleet of fairy boats that had strayed here for a while from that enchanted land. Why was he not there? To-morrow he would go. How he conveyed all this to Hilda it is impossible to tell. One must become a child again to get it as Hilda did. But suddenly all these plans and speculations were broken. From far away came a voice, which even the distance and the mild night wind that bore it could not

soften, calling to Pierre. The boy frowned and moved uneasily. Then he rose and turned to go. He had stayed out too late, and there would be trouble. He had hardly left the hut when he met his grandfather, Jean Pilliod.

"Come with me," said the old man, kindly. He gave a long "haloo" in answer to his daughter's call and led the way back to the hut.

He stopped by the door a moment to speak with Hilda, and then going inside, he lit the lamp and drew his chair by the bedside. The invalid greeted him with a pitiful smile, and without a word broke into feeble weeping. Jean Pilliod took her hand and caressed it with his hard, bent fingers.

"There — there," he said, "why do you cry? Are you suffering to-night?"

"I am dying," she whispered. It was the sound of his gentle voice as he spoke to Hilda that had made her weep. As soon as she could control her voice, she said: —

"I don't know when it will come, but it will be soon now. When I am dead, send Hilda to the asylum. I went there often to see, while I was still strong enough to walk.

They are good to the children. But I want you to see that she finds a good home."

"I will promise you that," he replied simply. He knew that she would not live long, and it did not occur to him to speak as though she would.

"I wish I could take her myself," he added, "but I am growing old, and my good woman is dead. My son's wife would not want to be bothered. Even Pierre seems to be a trouble to her."

"You will put her in the asylum at once?" asked the mother, anxiously.

He knew what she meant. She would not even think unkindly of her husband, but she did not want her child left to his neglect.

"I will. You need not worry about that."

He told her he would send the doctor in the morning. He lifted Hilda from the doorstep and held her a moment in his arms. Then he kissed her good-night, and taking Pierre by the hand, trudged home.

"I took Pierre with me to the hut," he explained and so diverted the boy's trouble to himself. He took his scolding placidly, for in his own house he was much deafer than elsewhere. An hour later, Pierre

climbed out of his window and raced over the fields with the wind.

When he was weary, he curled up in the cave in the haystack and slept, surrounded by his buccaneers. Just before sunrise he awoke and returned to his bed and the strange stale existence of his home and school.

When Jean Pilliod put Hilda down, she rubbed her mouth with her sleeve and made a wry face. She ran laughing to her mother, saying, "I don't like Grandpa Pilliod's kisses, 'cause his beard tickles." Then, seeing that her mother was weeping, she stood still and was frightened.

"Come here, Hilda," said her mother, smiling; "be my little nurse for a while. Take my handkerchief first and wipe these mean old tears away."

"Oh, yes," cried Hilda, all happiness at once, "we won't have them, will we?"

She climbed on the bed and settled herself by her mother's head, gently stroking it, crooning the song she had just made to the stars. It was not long before she fell asleep to her own lullaby.

CHAPTER V

HILDA was awakened in the night by a peculiar noise. The oil in the lamp had burned out and the place was in darkness. A path of moonlight stretched across the floor from the open door, and her father, grown sleepy and stupid from the beer he had consumed, had followed this pathway until it brought him against the wall. Here he stood for some time, rubbing over it with his outstretched hands, knocking against it with his knees and toes.

"Come, now," he murmured in a coaxing voice. "Lemmy in, Hilda," he whimpered; "open the door."

While Hilda was staring at him half asleep, her mother drew her gently down beside her.

"He's just talking to himself," she said. "Don't mind about it, little one."

"What makes him do that, mamma?"

"There, never mind. Go to sleep again,

can't you? He's stretched himself on the floor. He'll be quiet now. What was the song you were singing to me?"

"I am so sleepy," said the child, nestling closer. She had never before been permitted to sleep with her mother and was afraid that she would have to undress and climb into her crib. It was so odd, however, that she could not help speaking of it.

"I am all dressed, ain't I? But you don't care, do you, dear?"

"Not to-night. Stay close to me to-night. Perhaps — I shall leave you soon."

Hilda felt that her mother was distressed, but she gathered nothing from her words.

"Are you afraid?" she whispered.

"I am going away — oh, don't you understand, Hilda? I am going to die."

These words meant nothing to the child, for she knew nothing of death, and could not conceive of her mother leaving her. But the troubled and fear-stricken heart of her mother found some way to speak to her. She was frightened and began to cry. The poor woman was brought quickly to herself.

"There, there, my little one," she said.

"Did I frighten you? You must not cry. Mamma is going to a beautiful place as bright and beautiful as the city you and Pierre have built."

"Are you going down the river where the light is?"

"Would you like to think that I am there?"

"Why, mamma, do you know that Pierre and me are going there, too? You'll wait for us, won't you?"

"If I can, little daughter. But if I am gone some day, you must not cry, but think of the beautiful place where the light is, and that I am there waiting for you."

"And Pierre, mamma,—for me and Pierre."

"Now sing me your little song again."

Hilda tried hard to remember it, but the next thing she knew the sparrows were chirping and chattering by the window, and the sun was shining on the bed. She sat up and rubbed her eyes.

"Why, it's morning," she said.

Her mother was awake and smiling. The cool breath of morning, moist and sweet from the dewy earth, came through the door.

"He is gone," said the mother. "I told him not to waken you."

“I feel awful mussy,” said Hilda, as she jumped from the bed. But she knew what to do. In a moment she had pulled her tub from under her washstand. She brought water from the river until it was half full. A moment more and she was splashing in her bath as merrily as a robin in a pool. When she jumped out, her sweet little body was all aglow, and her eyes were sparkling with pure physical delight. No one had taught this mother and child how to live. Such as these are the real glory of the civilization from which they spring, as the flowers of the lonely wilderness, rather than the gardens of princes, reveal the beauty of the earth.

It was now the first week in May, and this was a perfect morning of the season. The rains of spring had fallen, the winds no longer hurried here and there in restless gusts. The sun shone with dazzling brightness, but the air was cool and moist. A warm, sweet odour rose from the earth. The grass was now a deep rich green, and every bush and tree was laden with young leaves. Such birds as were successfully mated were busy at nest building; but now and then a tardy lover proclaimed

his virtues from a swaying bough, or some unfortunate one uttered his low complaint. And there were young husbands, too, who stopped for a moment in their labour to sing, just for the joy of living.

Hilda, rosy from her bath, dressed all in fresh clothes, was as true a creature of the season and the day as any bird or blossom or leafy twig of the fields. She brought a basin of water and helped her mother bathe. She cooked their breakfast and put the room to rights, singing as she worked. As she was sweeping the dust out the door, a little yellow butterfly flew past her into the room.

“Good morning, Mrs. Butterfly,” she said, and then reminded of a game she loved she quickly put her broom into its corner and ran toward the bed, calling: “Oh, mamma, let’s play ‘Lady come to see.’ Here is a caller already, and I’ll be Mrs. —”

She stopped suddenly, for her mother seemed asleep. She lay quietly with her eyes closed. A single tremor passed through the child’s body, for there was an expression on the white still face she had never seen. It was only a moment, however, for her mother had often fallen asleep as they played,

and now her face seemed very beautiful. The butterfly was beating against the window near the bed, and Hilda tiptoed to it.

"We must go outside and play," she whispered. She closed her hands carefully over her visitor and carried it to the door, laughing because its legs and wings tickled her palms. Tossing it into the air, she ran after it as light of heart and aimless as was ever a thistle-blow borne from its stem, to its fortune, on a random wind.

For an hour she strayed in the fields among the hosts of her gay little kindred. Returning, she was met by the doctor and Jean Pilliod.

The old farmer's voice trembled a little as he said, "Come, Hilda, your mother wants you to go with me."

The child did not even look back upon the home she was leaving. True to her nature, she caught something of the feeling of the two men and walked silently beside them, wondering.

They found Jane Pilliod, the wife of Jean's son Alphonse, in the kitchen. Her face was red, and her rolled-up sleeves revealed two sinewy arms. She challenged the entrance

of the old man and the child with a glance of her sharp eyes.

"She's gone," said Jean, cautiously.

"Oh, she's dead, is she?"

"Hush, Jane, the little one don't know. She'll be less trouble to you, if —"

"She'll be trouble enough, poor young one. I can't have her on my hands, though, and that's settled."

"I'll take her to the asylum in a day or two. Be good to her, Jane."

"Hilda, throw those old flowers out doors. You will be littering up the whole house with them."

Hilda had been standing quietly by Jean Pilliod, holding one of his hands. Her face was flushed, and she looked steadily at a crack in the floor. Now she pulled him down toward her, and, reaching up, whispered, "Can't I go home, please?"

"Not now, little one. You stay here, like a good girl, and I will bring Pierre."

Hilda went to the door and tossed the flowers she had been clutching upon the ground. Then she shyly sidled to a chair, as far from Jane as possible, and climbed upon its edge. For a long time she sat there

while Mrs. Pilliod bustled about. Once, when she was alone for a few moments, she ventured to make herself more comfortable. Suddenly Mrs. Pilliod pushed another chair before her and placed a pan of potatoes on it.

"Wash those," she said. "I guess it won't hurt you to do something."

"Oh, thank you," said Hilda. In a moment she was almost happy.

"Can I pare them, please?" she asked.

"You wouldn't pare them thin enough."

"Oh, I can do it just as thin as anything and dig all the eyes out, too."

"Well, I'll bake them now. I haven't time to watch you."

Hilda slipped from her chair and went toward the shelf where the pans were kept.

"Shall I take this to rinse them in?"

"Yes; I forgot that. It's a wonder I remember anything with all I have to do."

"I guess you must be awful busy."

"Humph!"

"You have such a big house. I only have a little place to mind, but it keeps me busy, too."

"There, now," said Mrs. Pilliod, "don't talk so much. You bother me."

There was a touch of kindness in the voice, however, and Hilda felt this more than the reproof. She kept very quiet, and finding she could do nothing more went to sit on the door-sill. When Alphonse came in from the field at noon, he heard her singing softly to herself.

"She seems to be happy," he said to his wife.

"She'll make fuss enough when night comes," she replied.

Jean Pilliod came, bringing Pierre. The boy was filled with wonder at the unexpected holiday and the fact that his grandfather had come for him. The children sat quietly together at the table, under the restraint of the unusual, feeling what they could not understand.

"Will there be a funeral?" asked Alphonse.

"Of course not," replied his wife. "The town must bury her."

"When will they come for her?"

"This afternoon," said Jean Pilliod, solemnly.

"You must stay around here," Jane said to the children, as they hurried outdoors

after dinner. They hardly heard her. They were eager to get away. Pierre had no idea of what was happening, but he felt the presence of a mystery. Hilda was anxious to tell him what she knew and had been thinking about. As soon as they were alone she said: —

“ Pierre, my mamma has gone. She’s gone to the beautiful place down the river. She couldn’t wait for us, Pierre. She ain’t over there any more, and I can’t ever go back, I guess.”

“ How do you know ? ” Pierre looked from her to the hut across the island, in astonishment.

“ She told me.”

“ She ain’t there any more ? ”

“ No. Oh, Pierre! I want to go to her.”

“ Come on, then. Let’s see first if she’s gone.”

Pierre took Hilda’s hand and they started toward the hut.

“ Pierre! Pierre!” called the sharp voice of his mother. “ Come back here. Didn’t I tell you not to go away ? ”

The boy cast a look of hatred toward the house.

As the culprits returned, Mrs. Pilliod stood in the doorway watching them.

“Now you come in here! I’ll see whether you will mind me or not!”

Pierre entered in sullen silence and Hilda followed, pulling at her apron. She stood for a moment near the door until she found the courage to say:—

“Please don’t be angry at Pierre. I asked him to go. I forgot.”

“Go into the parlour, both of you, and be quiet.”

The parlour was a place Pierre had seen only when sent there as a punishment. It was his prison. His idea of a dungeon was a gloomy, silent room like this. The blinds were always closed, the air was musty from long confinement. The pictures on the wall were veiled with netting. The sombre furniture seemed to watch him, frowning. He had never dared to sit upon the forbidding chairs. The yawning lounge seemed waiting to devour him. There was a thick rag carpet on the floor, and the silence of his tread filled him with fear. He had been shut in here from time to time since he was three years old. All the nameless terrors of

his infancy were still here, modified, perhaps, by his growing knowledge and by his courage, but no less real. If Hilda had come here first alone, she would have made friends with everything at once, but, entering with Pierre, she was affected by his feeling.

“What’s in here?” she asked in a voice of awe as the door closed behind them. The presence of Hilda made Pierre bolder. Called upon by her question, his imagination sought for an instant to give form and substance to the terrors of the place, and failing, they began to fade.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said. He flung an almost contemptuous glance at the lounge. Half an hour later they were safely concealed in a cave, made by piling the chairs across one corner of the room. Here they crouched, now holding their breath, now peering constantly forth at a host of strange pursuers. There was still enough of gloom and the old sense of fear left to give to their play an added degree of delight. When tired of the cave, it became a ship. As they began to float away in this, Hilda said, clapping her hands joyfully, —

“Oh, look, Pierre, mamma is here, too.”

Pierre stopped working at the sail and became thoughtful.

"To-night," he said, "we will go and see if she is there."

"But let's play she is here now."

"No; we are on a long voyage to find her."

"I wish she was here," said Hilda, almost tearfully.

"All right," said Pierre; "we will make her a nice bed to lie on."

They took the crocheted cover from the back of the lounge and arranged it in the corner.

Hilda sat by her mother, and Pierre stood by the mast to scan the horizon.

"I think," he said, "that a storm is coming."

He made a noise like the wind and began to work hard at the ropes.

"Shall I help you?" asked Hilda.

"No, no," panted Pierre; "you stay in the cabin."

The storm swept rapidly on them, but when it broke they were ready for it. It was a brave little ship, and Pierre was its master. He now stood erect and confident

in the bow, with folded arms, while the waves tossed around him, the wind roared and whistled overhead, and the rain dashed in his face. Oh, how he loved a wild tempest! He could have shouted in his joy.

Hilda knew by the way Pierre stood that a terrible storm was raging. But she thought only of her mother and sat closer to her, singing softly so if she woke she would hear and see her first and not be frightened.

Meanwhile a spring wagon, bearing a long pine box, had been driven to the hut and back to the village again.

When the storm in the parlour was at its height the door opened, and Mrs. Pilliod looked in.

"What are you doing there?" she called. In a moment she had boarded the gallant ship. With one hand she swept Pierre into the sea and with the other pulled Hilda from the cabin.

"Now get out of here, both of you. Go outdoors and leave things alone. I never saw such children, never!"

Outside Pierre threw himself on the ground and bit the earth in his rage.

"Don't cry," sobbed Hilda; "don't cry."

"I ain't crying," said the boy, fiercely. "I hate her."

That night Pierre and Hilda slept together. They sat very quietly in the sitting room with their elders all the evening. Jean Pilliod held the girl in his arms and wondered why she did not ask for her mother. When the children had been sent to bed, Alphonse looked at his wife.

"I thought she would give us more trouble."

"If you'd had to look after her all day, you'd think she was trouble enough."

"She don't seem to miss her mother. I thought she would."

"She has no heart," replied the woman. "Children care for nothing but themselves."

"I am glad," said Jean Pilliod, "she had Pierre to play with."

"Pierre plays too much. Why don't you find him something to do, Alphonse?"

"I have been thinking of that. He is getting big enough to work."

"He is still at school," said old Jean, shifting uneasily in his chair. "He'll have to work soon enough."

"There you go," said the woman. "He'll be good for nothing."

Jane Pilliod did not believe in waiting on children, so Pierre and Hilda were sent to bed alone. This, however, was no grievance to them. All the afternoon they had been waiting for night to come. Any one who understood children could have seen that during the evening, as they sat quietly together exchanging only a whispered word or two, they were eager and impatient.

"How do we get out?" asked Hilda, as soon as they were in their room.

"You'll see," said Pierre.

He led the way to the window.

"I climb down this vine to the roof of the shed and jump off."

As they looked out, a thrill of pleasure seemed to run all down the vine.

"Hello, Pierre," cried the young leaves. "Do you see how nice we've grown?" "Look at me," "And me." Those at the top caught sight of Hilda peering anxiously downward. They passed the news to the ones below them, and there was instantly a great prying and peering and many exclamations of wonder.

“Oh, Pierre,” said Hilda, “do you think I can do it?”

“Of course. I’ll help you down.”

They were obliged first to go to bed for fear any one should come in. Pierre unbuttoned Hilda’s waist for her and brought one of his night-dresses.

“I’d better sit up,” said Hilda, as she climbed in the bed, “or I’ll go to sleep, maybe.”

“I won’t,” said Pierre. “I can stay awake as long as I want to.”

“I can’t. Sometimes, when I am in bed, the fairies come and I want to stay awake and play with them. Just when we are having the loveliest time I guess I must go to sleep, for all at once it’s morning always and we weren’t half begun.”

“Lie down,” said Pierre. “Some one is coming.”

“Ain’t you asleep yet?” called Mrs. Pilliod.

“Yes, ma’am,” piped Hilda, as she scrambled under the clothes.

“Well, you go to sleep now and stop talking.”

After a long time of great silence Hilda whispered, —

“ Pierre ! ”

“ What ? ”

“ I ain't asleep yet. ”

The boy sat up and listened. He could hear outside the great pulse of the night, the rhythmic beating of thousands upon thousands of little voices. Inside the house there was no sound.

He climbed out of bed and Hilda followed. In a moment they were dressed and by the window again. Pierre climbed quickly out, but as soon as he had descended a few feet, he stopped and told Hilda what to do. She climbed on the sill and took hold of the vine. She hesitated a moment, then shut her eyes and slipped off her seat. Pierre caught her feet and placed them on a branch. Finding herself safe, Hilda opened her eyes and laughed.

“ Keep still, ” whispered Pierre ; “ they'll hear us. ”

After a step or two Hilda could find places for her feet without Pierre's aid, and they were soon upon the ground.

This was Hilda's first night in the fields. As she raced with Pierre toward the hut, all fear of the shadows left her, and something

of the sense of liberty and love of adventure that he felt came also to her. Never again could she see the moonlight on the earth, the ghostly forms of trees and bushes, or hear the night sounds without an emotion of wild delight and nameless expectation.

Pierre was some distance ahead when they neared the hut and Hilda called to him to wait for her. As they entered its shadow, they stopped a moment and listened. Hilda suddenly remembered the strange expression she had last seen on her mother's face, and the fear she had felt before passed over her.

"She is gone," she whispered, taking hold of Pierre. "I know she is gone."

"Come," he said slowly, "let's look." The door was open and they peered cautiously in. The light shone through the window across the bed. There was no one there. Even the coverings and tick were gone, leaving only the bare frame.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" gasped Hilda. "I wish she had waited for me."

"Don't cry," said Pierre. "We'll find her again. Come on!"

He took the girl's hand and led her away.

"Where are we going?" she asked, realiz-

ing by his manner that he had some purpose in view.

“Down the river,” he replied.

Hilda was not afraid this time when they reached the boat. She sat on the bottom in one end, and Pierre, standing in the other, pushed away from the shore. He worked steadily with his pole until they had passed around the end of the island. As they skirted the small knolls they had previously visited, he scarcely noticed them. He was away at last to the truly far-off lands. Every push took him farther away from all that held and worried him. Presently the main channel was reached, and he could no longer touch bottom. He drew in his pole and held it beside him as a mast against which he leaned. The motion of the boat, slow at first, became after an hour almost imperceptible, for the wind blowing up the river was rapidly growing stronger, and the tide from the lake began to turn the flow. Pierre was not concerned by this. The island slipped slowly behind him, and he kept his eyes fixed upon the glowing sky above the city. For over two hours he stood at his post, sometimes proudly scanning the fleet that fol-

lowed him, and again wandering through the glittering streets of the city he had already reached. He grew very tired without knowing it, and it was not upon the bottom of his flat-boat that he finally stretched himself, but upon a floating bed of clouds that bore him through the chambers of palaces, and along the shining streets, thronged with birds he could talk with, and fairies who called him by name. He understood everything now, and every one about him had always known what he wanted.

In the midst of it all he heard some one he could not see calling him. He knew that if he listened he would have to go back, and he tried hard to cover his ears. The effort awoke him, and he found himself in his boat at the edge of the island. His grandfather was standing on the bank with Hilda in his arms.

“Come, Pierre,” he said; “you have given us a fright.”

“Are we there?” asked Hilda.

She tried to lift her head, but old Jean pressed it back on his shoulder, and she was asleep again. Pierre gazed about him in bewilderment.

“Hurry,” said his grandfather. “Your father and mother are hunting for you, too.”

“Oh dear,” said the boy, “I thought I was gone.”

He kicked the boat in his vexation, and followed his grandfather to the house. He took his whipping without a sound, but Hilda wept bitterly for him.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Hilda was taken to the asylum, Pierre felt the separation even more than she. She had been so true a companion that he did not know how much her sympathy was to him, nor how much of their happiness was due to her, until she was gone. When he came from school and looked down upon the island from the hill, he could see the little stone under the willows where Hilda had always waited for him, but she was no longer there. He did not know at first what the trouble was. Every day, for a time, when he reached the crest of the hill, he looked below with the old expectation of pleasure, if his spirits were good; or indifference, if in a quiet mood. Each time the sight of the deserted stone brought him a fresh surprise, a sudden shock of the heart, followed by a dreary sense of loneliness. About a mile down the river he could see the cluster of buildings that formed the asylum.

Hilda parted from the island and Pierre very quietly. She was a little shy at first with the three hundred children she found herself among. Her uniform of striped blue and white gingham pleased her for a time. And then she was constantly learning to do strange things, and the effort to understand what was expected of her kept her wits alert. As, however, the life about her became more familiar, she began to feel the dulness of its routine. She was no longer an individual free to follow her own desires. She did not even have the responsibilities that had made her days so busy and important at home. She was just one of a great number of wards, utterly lost among them. Those in charge of the institution — the matrons, the nurses, and the teachers — were very far away from her. They looked at her, not as if seeing a little girl who wanted to know them and love them, but as a nameless creature, among many others. She began to long for Pierre, and her happiest moments were those in which, left alone for a time, she could play at being again on the island with him. Every morning, all the three hundred children were put through a process of cleaning up — their

hands and faces were washed, their hair curled and tied with ribbon. They were dressed in fresh uniforms. This, of course, was a great task for the attendants, — a part of their day's duty, a matter of rule, — and the children were hurried through in groups without any individual care. All this was done simply to make them more attractive in the eyes of those seeking children to adopt.

Hilda was taught, with the others, to call every man or woman who entered "papa" or "mamma," and she caught the feeling very soon that nothing here was for her affection. She was told over and over that some day one of the visitors who came would take her away; that if she were a good girl she could go with a kind mamma, but if not, a bad one would get her. This idea began to take a very strong hold upon her fancy, and she looked with apprehension into the face of every stranger.

One day, as she was standing apart from the children, gazing in this manner at a very tall, prim woman, who had been for some time examining them, she felt the eyes of the visitor fixed upon her, and there was an instant sinking at her heart.

"Come here," said the matron, motioning to her.

She knew that she ought to run gladly to the stranger and call her "mamma," but somehow the words froze upon her lips. She moved shyly nearer, glanced with a timid smile into the critical face above her and then upon the floor.

"She seems like a quiet little thing," said the woman. "I certainly don't like children who are noisy. Have you ever had the measles?" she said.

Hilda thought from her voice that this was something she should have had, so she answered, "Yes, ma'am."

"I would rather have a child," said the woman, "who has had all these things; but she looks well enough, and I guess she'll do."

"Well," said the matron, "I will, of course, have to see her guardian, Mr. Pilliod, and get his consent; but there will be no trouble about that. You can be very thankful," she said, turning to Hilda, "that you have got such a good home so soon. In a few days your new mamma will come and take you way out to Dakota."

“Thank you,” said Hilda. She looked up and smiled bravely, but in reality this interview had filled her with a feeling of utter desolation, why, she could not have told. She had, before this, discovered a window at one end of an upper hall from which she could see her island. Here she went as soon as she was free, and, leaning against the sill, pressed her cheek close to the pane. Never before had her face expressed a settled sadness. For the first time in her life had come apprehension and conscious memory. She thought of Pierre, of her mother, and longed for them. She wished that they would come for her now. Her heart rebelled at the thought of this strange woman becoming her mother, whom she had always hoped to find again. The word “Dakota” filled her with terror. It was not one of the places that Pierre wished to find. It sounded like a place far outside all that she had known or hoped for. She did not cry, and made no complaint. She would, in fact, have met even such a fate as her mother’s with a like patience. She would bloom in the sunlight and droop in the shadow; but she would more often smile than weep, whatever her fate.

The letter from Sister Pelagia not only reminded Mr. Alexander of the child, but it made his half-fancied projects concerning her seem more possible. When he finished reading it, he reproached himself for his failure to visit the island again and keep his promise to her and to himself.

“She has forgotten me by this time,” he said. “Children do not remember.”

This, however, did not satisfy him. He had meant to keep closer track of her, and to do something for her and her mother. That evening he said to Mr. Mott, —

“You remember the little girl I thought something of adopting?”

“The child you met on the day you saw the *Pogonia*? I must go up there some day and see about that.”

“We will go together. I think I will take the child if I can arrange it.”

He hesitated a moment, and then added: “Would you be willing to give her a home here? I would send her to a convent to be educated, but I would want this to be her home.”

“I should think Primrose would be glad of that,” said Mr. Mott. “We will speak to her.”

They found her in the new enclosure training the young vines which had already begun to throw out hundreds of tendrils about the summer-house built for her. Nearly two months had passed since this little Eden had been designed. The sod was well set, a number of bushes and trees were planted, a simple fountain was playing in its basin, the overflow from which fed a tiny stream that crossed the lawn.

"Primrose," said her father, "Mr. Alexander wants us to make a home for a little girl of his."

"Have you a child?" she asked, looking eagerly into his eyes.

"Not one of my own," he replied, smiling; "but I may adopt one. If I do, will you be her sister?"

"Oh," said Primrose, "will you really bring her to me? If you do, you will make me very happy. I have never had any but make-believes; and if you bring me a real little girl for a sister, you will see how I will love her."

Now at this very moment Hilda was turning sadly from the window in the asylum, for the twilight had hidden her island from

her. These three friends of hers did not know what need there was for haste.

Mr. Alexander was in good spirits as he left the garden.

"We will go up there in a few days," he called back to Mr. Mott, "and look after our Pogonias."

The next afternoon, as he was leaving his office, he heard the hoarse call of the up-river steamer as it neared its dock a few blocks away. It was a hot afternoon, and the thought of the cool deck came to him with a pleasant suggestion. He would take the ride up to Perrysburg and back. He walked to the river and watched the landing of the boat. It was filled with children. He saw them peering excitedly over the rail of the upper deck, and heard their piping voices. It was a pleasant sight and sound to him. He stepped aboard, and, going above, placed his chair near the bow where he could feel and hear the children near him, and watch the distant windings of the river. When the boat was in motion, the wind stirred about him and he bared his head to its touch. He passed a group of great red grain elevators marked No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, No. 4, in enor-

mous white letters. They were his own. Moored to the dock by them were two of the finest steam barges on the lakes, each bearing his name with different numbers to distinguish them. He saw men toiling about the elevators and boats, and thought as he had often before, "Those fellows there ought not to work all the time."

Whenever he looked at the world of labour and saw its poverty and narrow bounds, he felt that something was wrong; but seeing no way to remedy it, he looked away.

The bridges, that bound the east and west sides of the city, were opened to let them through. Lumber yards and coal pits were passed. Then came a mile of houses close together, then a few stragglers, and the city was behind. Now the clear blue waters ran between green meadows, market gardens, little hills covered with vineyards and fruit orchards, and now and then appeared a remnant of the fine forest that once covered the banks. He could see in the distance, on the right, the buildings of the asylum, and on the left, farther up, the spire of the Church of Our Lady. In half an hour he would turn a bend in the river and get a

view of the island and the village of Maumee behind it. He was not consciously thinking at all, but just idly watching the passing beauty, or turning a moment now and then to look at a group of children who came near him in their play. Suddenly he felt a little hand upon his knee, and looking down, he saw his small friend of the island. She was smiling, as if in expectation of happiness; but there was something wistful and shy in the expression of her eyes that spoke of uncertainty. She was much older than she was two months before.

"Hello, little one," he said, taking her on his knee at once, "what are you doing here?"

"I'm having a excursion."

"Is your mamma here?" he asked, looking around to see.

"Oh, no. My mamma's gone. I looked everywhere for her to-day, but she wasn't there. We didn't go far enough, I guess."

She suddenly became restless, and slipping from his knee said excitedly, —

"I *must* find my own mamma or they will send me away with another one I don't like at all."

He took her hand and said gently, —

“Are you in the asylum?”

“Yes; but a terrible tall woman is going to take me 'way off to Dakota, and I don't want to go either; and I've been just as good as I can be, too.”

“Well, now, you see here,” said Mr. Alexander, jumping up, “they'll do nothing of the kind. You're my little girl if your mother's gone, and you'll come with me and no one else.”

“Oh, am I?” she cried. “Oh, goody, goody, but I'm glad!”

They found the matron sunning herself on the lee side of the boat, and the matter was quickly arranged to his satisfaction, for he was one of the trustees of the asylum.

“Hilda is a very beautiful and affectionate child,” said the matron, “and I am glad you will take her.”

“No one, not even Jean Pilliod, must know where she has gone,” said he. “Even you must forget.”

“Very well,” replied the matron, “I will begin now, and so the record of her adoption by the Dakota woman will remain unchanged. It will do no harm.”

She knew that Mr. Pilliod, having satisfied himself that Hilda would have a comfortable home, did not expect to see her again; and she knew also that he would gladly consent to the change, were he asked.

“What shall I say to the woman when she comes?”

“Tell her that an old friend of the family appeared and took her away. I will make things sure by keeping Hilda with me now.”

Hilda stood close to him, holding his hand and occasionally pressing her cheek against it.

“How about her clothes and playthings?” asked the matron.

“I will get everything new for her. Hilda,” he asked, “is there anything of yours at the asylum you would like?”

“Only Alice.”

“Who is Alice?”

“She’s my daughter. She isn’t very well, you know.”

“Is it a doll?” asked Mr. Alexander. The matron nodded, but Hilda said earnestly, —

“No, no, she’s my daughter. Really and truly she is. You won’t leave her there, will you?”

"Of course we won't. I'll send my carriage for Alice in the morning. If she is sick, you know it would never do to send her by mail."

"Her arm came off with the measles, and her face got cracked with whooping-cough. And every time she has a wedding the cake and candy makes her worse."

"Well, well, she must have a hard time of it."

"I love Alice very much, don't you?" She looked up at him smiling sweetly.

"Yes, I am very fond of Alice and of her mamma, too."

"Is that me?" she asked.

"I guess it is," he replied.

It had been a great many years since he had spoken of love to any one, and it seemed strange to him.

"I love you, too," said the child. When the boat stopped at the landing, Mr. Alexander and Hilda stood by the rail and watched the children troop ashore.

"I don't have to go back, do I?" said she, holding fast to his hand.

"No, indeed. You are going with me to a pretty little home in a garden where your

Uncle Christopher and your big sister Primrose are expecting you."

"Do they love me, too?"

"Yes, indeed, they do — very much."

She sighed with satisfaction and went quietly with him to his seat in the bow. She climbed on a chair and, kneeling down, rested her arms on the rail.

"Look, look," she cried eagerly, as the island swept full into view; "it is there." She pointed toward it and then grew quiet again. Until Perrysburg was reached, and while the boat was at the wharf, she remained motionless by the rail. When they turned around to return, she crossed to the other side and climbed again to where she could see. The boat, as it circled about, approached closer to the island, and Hilda thought she saw Pierre standing in the midst of their city, looking toward them. The boat turned a little more and the island passed out of her view.

Mr. Alexander had been watching her thoughtfully. He had been surprised by the intentness of her gaze and by her silence. As he followed the play of emotions over her young face, he was troubled. Had he

appeared too late? Was it possible that sorrow had already sown its seeds here? He wished he could read her thoughts; but he felt that she herself did not know what they were, and he hesitated to question her. Sensitive as he was to the curious gaze of others, he could not attempt to pry into even this child's heart without a sense of shame. He began to feel that he should not watch her so closely, and looked away.

A child like Hilda could not long escape the influence of such a presence. She looked into his face and turning about in her chair, nestled close beside him. He put his arm about her and was reassured.

"She will forget all that," he said to himself. "She is surely too young to remember."

Most children have made many imaginary visits to fairyland, but Hilda is the only one I know who ever really went there. The moment she passed through the gate, between the lilac bushes, and saw the garden about her and the quaint little cottage in the centre, she knew that she was there. Primrose saw them from the kitchen door, and came out to meet them. The moment Hilda looked into her homely face, she began to worship her,

for she saw at once how beautiful she was. Could children paint, the world would bow in adoration before the portraits of those who love them; for it would see, for the first time, the countenance of the Divine.

“This is Hilda,” said Mr. Alexander.

Now, Primrose did not even kiss her. She only said: “I was just about to pick some flowers for the table. Come on, Hilda.”

“Oh, my,” cried the child, as she went with Primrose through the garden, “just look at those pansies! Oh, mercy on us, I never saw so many! I know what those are, too,—they are tulips. Oh, look, Primrose, what are them?”

“What are those?”

“Yes, I mean those. What *are* they; tell me quick.”

“They are hyacinths.”

“It don’t hurt the flowers to pick them, does it?”

“No, but we won’t pick the hyacinths nor the tulips nor the daffodils, those yellow flowers over there, for they came from little bulbs that have waited patiently in the ground all winter and only bloom once. So we will

let them keep their blossom as long as they can. But we will pick the pansies and violets, for it will be good for them, and the new buds will do better."

Primrose showed her how to find the ones with the long stems.

"You may pick the bouquets for us every day," she said, "and that will be a great help."

"Oh, but I can do lots of things if you'll just let me."

"Can you? I am glad of that, for I need some one very much."

"Why, I can do most anything. I can cook and sweep and set the table and wash dishes and make all Alice's clothes, — I wish Alice was here now; she would be very, very happy, and you would love her, too. Maybe she'd get well, only her arm's off and her face is all cracked up terrible — she can't ever be real well, I guess, can she?"

"Where is Alice?"

"At the asylum. He is going to take her in his carriage because she's too sick to send by — by mail. What is mail?"

"I'll show you some day. It's the way letters are sent. I'll tell you all about it, so you'll know. But who is 'he'?"

"Why, him."

"Mr. Alexander?"

"He brought me here and is always going to be good to me. He said so."

"Would you like to call him papa?"

"No," she shuddered a little.

"I'll tell you what," said Primrose, hastily, "call him Uncle Minot. He'd like that best, I guess."

"Then I've got two uncles already, Uncle Minot and Uncle Christopher, and you are my dear, dear sister Primrose."

"Oh, you have a great many more folks than that. There is a family right under that bush, and every one of them are your own cousins."

"Really?" asked Hilda, looking first at the bush and then quizzically into Primrose's face.

"I know," she whispered. Then looking at the bush again she cried merrily: "I can see them all at the window. Can I take them a pansy? This one, see, it's just a little one and won't matter."

She jumped up and, running to the bush, tossed the flower in. "My name's Hilda," she said. "What's yours?"

“I’ll tell you to-morrow all about them,” said Primrose. “We must go and get supper now. I’ll take you to the summer-house and show you all your little nieces and nephews — my own children, you know. I have a new home for them now, and I’ll show you that, too. But the vines have not covered it yet, and the old place is better for them. I will teach you how to help the vines grow.”

“I wish it was to-morrow,” said the child.

When Mr. Alexander and Mr. Mott came in, they saw Primrose and Hilda putting the supper on the table.

“Isn’t she wonderful?” asked Mr. Alexander, proudly.

Mr. Mott put on his spectacles and called her to him.

She had been eagerly helping Primrose and had not noticed their entrance. She suddenly became quiet at this summons and moved shyly toward him. He examined her as critically as he would one of his young cuttings, and said: —

“She seems to be well made and healthy. How do you find her, Primrose?”

“Hilda, bring me a dish for the potatoes,”

called Primrose. "Now you watch the coffee," she said, "and tell me when it boils."

She took the two men to the porch and said, —

"Don't you ever talk about Hilda to her face again."

Her eyes snapped as she said this, and her voice was actually severe. Mr. Mott had never seen her like this before, and he looked at her aghast.

"Can she hear?" he asked in confusion.

"Didn't you see her ears? You looked at her close enough."

"Why, Primrose," faltered the old man, "I didn't suppose she would understand."

Primrose became herself again.

"Of course you didn't," she said; "I ought not to have spoken so. But she does understand everything. Just treat her as you do me and you'll see."

The two old fellows entered, rather crestfallen, and sat down to the table in silence. Mr. Mott looked at Hilda askance. He seemed rather afraid of her. He wanted very much to be agreeable, but he didn't know how. She caught his look, however, and seemed to understand; for she said,

as she tucked her napkin under her chin, "You're my Uncle Christopher, ain't you?"

That evening everything was made right between them forever, for he told her a story, as they sat on the porch, about a bee that had been brought up on basswood honey, and passed through many adventures, searching for it when it grew up.

Whenever she saw a bee among the flowers after this, she knew what he was doing, and wondered if he was satisfied with what he got, or if he was still looking for a basswood tree.

CHAPTER VII

EARLY in the morning, Primrose took Hilda into the garden and began to introduce her to its wonders. For thirty years she had walked and worked here, and every day had revealed to her some new friend, and made the old ones dearer. She had kept all her dolls, and a number of them were discovered now in little secret places along the gravel paths and in the old summer-house. She was the right kind of a guide through fairyland.

“And now,” said she, “we will go to the enclosure, for that is the place where we will be most of the time. We have a great deal to do there, for it is all new, and there are vines to train, and things to plant, and walks to make. That is to belong to us. It is our very own, and when any one comes there, they are just our visitors.”

As they walked about the enclosure, everything they saw was divided between them.

Certain of the bushes and flowers and trees would belong to Primrose, and certain others would be Hilda's own. While effecting this division, which was making Hilda happy to giddiness, they came upon two climbing roses, growing close together, by the summer-house.

Hilda chose one of these, and then stood for a moment looking thoughtfully at both.

"Primrose," she said presently, "is yours any one in particular?"

"No, Hilda; why?"

"Well, would you mind very much if I had it, too?"

"I would like that very much. They shall both be yours."

This seemed to please the child more than anything that had occurred, and she returned frequently during the day to her rose vines.

Every afternoon Mr. Alexander hurried from his office to Mr. Mott's. All day he thought of Hilda, recalling something she had said or done the day before, trying to picture what she might be doing now. He no longer feared that her previous life had formed a bias toward sorrow. He saw that she had brought no troubles with her.

There was no sign of melancholy nor of longing. She seemed to have forgotten everything outside the garden and her daily life, and she found nothing there but affection and delight. As he became certain of this, and as his own love for Hilda grew, he was troubled by a new anxiety. Perhaps she would forget the days that were passing now as readily as those that had preceded them. In September, she would be sent to the convent. He would see very little of her in the years that followed. How, then, could he expect to become an influence in her life? He would be nothing to her at all. She would forget him as soon as she was gone. Such thoughts as these troubled him when he was at his office or his club. The moment he entered the garden they were put to flight by Hilda. The child seemed to realize that he belonged to her more than did the others. They were good to her and she was happy; but there was a different demand made upon her in her relations with her Uncle Minot. She felt that here the responsibility was reversed — that she must be good to him. She soon learned when to expect him. All the morning she

worked in the house and garden with Primrose. Sometimes in the afternoon she would sit for a while near Mr. Mott, silently watching him as he examined his bulbs, or made cuttings, or pruned his trees and shrubs, or repotted his plants. It was not long before he began to look for her coming and to miss her when she was not there. She was so receptive and so perfect a little embodiment of sympathy that he began unconsciously to talk out loud to her when she approached, just as he had for years communed with himself. She was a magnet to his thoughts, drawing them forth in speech. She listened, of course, as unconsciously as he talked. Perhaps it was only the pleasant sound of his voice, or the natural delight of children in watching whatever is doing, or it may have been both of these, combined with the beautiful spirit of the man, that drew her to him and made her contented to sit silently near. But unconscious of it as they both were, this constant flow of words and feeling, passing from the old man through the senses of the child, left its influence on her mind. Day by day the garden became more significant in her eyes. She began to have vague

ideas concerning the relation of the plants to the soil, the sunlight, and the air. She knew how the roots of many things appeared and spread out under the ground, how they searched for food and water and carried it up into the stalks and branches. She looked at the blossoms of the trees and knew that they told of the fruit to come. It is impossible to tell of the countless perceptions forming in her mind, of the questions that arose, of the fancies with which she was busy. Most of her fancies and inquiries were, no doubt, awakened by what she caught of the old gardener's discourses, but they were pursued either alone, with Primrose, or with Mr. Alexander. One day, when she met him at the gate where she was usually waiting for him, she said, —

“Uncle Minot, what does the beautiful heralds of the harvest mean?”

He hardly knew what to say to this question; but while he hesitated, looking down in some wonder at the little head so far below him, she added, “I know what they are, but I don't know what they mean.”

“What are they, little one?”

“They are the peach and apple blossoms.”

“That’s right,” he said, understanding at once what she wanted to know, but wondering how she had caught the phrase. “I’ll tell you what it means. The harvest means the fruit we gather from the trees or bushes, or the grain we get from the fields. A herald is some person or thing that tells about the coming of something else. Now, if you run ahead of me and tell Primrose I am coming, you will be my herald just as the blossoms tell us now that there will be peaches and apples and pears, quinces and currants and raspberries, and hundreds of other things a little later. In that way, they are the heralds of the harvest.”

He marvelled at this question of Hilda’s, but it was only one of a thousand things she said that were wonderful to him. I have known people who would laugh at so careful an answer to such a question from a child. They would think the words thrown away. But there are few children who do not make good use of what information is given them. The profoundest subjects are very simple to them.

A few days later, Hilda said to Primrose,—
“What kind of fruit will grow on the syringa bushes?”

“They don’t bear any fruit, Hilda. Did you think they did?”

“But just look at these beautiful heralds of the harvest. What are they doing, then?”

“There are lots of bushes that blossom, but don’t have any fruit.”

“Oh,” said Hilda, in the tone of one who has received information that does not inform.

Primrose noticed this and said, —

“We will ask Uncle Christopher about it.”

That evening, as they were all on the porch together, Hilda whispered to Primrose, “Ask him now.”

“What shall I ask him, dear, and which one shall I ask?”

“Uncle Christopher. Ask him about the bushes that blossom. You said you would.”

“Father,” said Primrose, “Hilda and I want to know why some trees and bushes blossom and don’t bear any fruit. You have often spoken of the blossoms as the beautiful heralds of the harvest, but there is no harvest from the syringa bushes.”

“Well, now, that is very true,” said Mr. Mott, “and it only shows how limited are most of our pet ideas. Poetical as that

phrase is, it gives a poor expression to the meaning of the blossoms. I will never use it again, for you and Hilda have helped me see a little farther. Every blossom in this garden is telling us the same thing. They are not thinking of something for us to eat at all, they are really saying: 'There is life and health in this stem where I am. The plant that bears me is a good plant and will be a great blessing to the earth and air that have fed it.'

"Beauty speaks for virtue wherever it is seen. I only have to look into your face, Hilda, to know that you are a good girl, good just as those fine, glowing tulips are good, and as worthy to be loved. And there is that little bush all twisted and wrinkled, but it is covered with rich green leaves and perfect blossoms, so I know it is a good bush, too, and will give life to others, even better perhaps. It is like Primrose here. The bush itself in her case is not so comely as in yours; but the leaves are sweet and green, and the blossoms are beautiful."

Primrose smiled on her father and was very happy. Hilda looked from her to the bush and laughed. She may have under-

stood very little of all this; but it was from such seeds as these that her philosophy grew.

For several days after this, Primrose often found Hilda gazing earnestly upon her face. She only smiled when she noticed this, but it caused her to wonder. At last Hilda said, —

“Primrose, is your smile the blossom?”

“I hardly knew myself just what it was,” replied Primrose; “but perhaps that is it.”

As the summer passed, Mr. Alexander began to feel a horror of the approaching separation. He spent more and more time in the garden. He was seldom there later than noon, and he often came to breakfast to remain for the day. When he was there, Hilda was near him. She seemed to make it a point to include him in whatever she did. He sometimes felt a little ashamed of his growing dependence on her and would get up from the porch where he had been sitting, while she was helping Primrose within, and join Mr. Mott, who was forever fussing with some vine, or tree, or plant in his experiment house. As long as he remained on the porch, Hilda would call to him now and then to tell

him what she and Primrose were doing, or, having left Alice in his care, would appear in the doorway at intervals to see how he fared. If he walked away, she seemed to forget him and become at once engrossed with her work and Primrose. They had a great deal to do, these two, for besides the housework, they looked after the vegetable beds and the new enclosure where, every day, something was waiting to be done. But you may be sure none of this was work to them. It was that which gave the greatest zest to the day at hand and made the morrow seem too far away.

When the housework was done, and they went into the garden, trowel or hoe in hand, each wearing a sunbonnet and a long apron, Hilda would look up Mr. Alexander. If he seemed to be contented where he was, having found some topic to discuss with his friend, or some experiment he was interested in watching, she would stand near him a moment, holding his hand, and then, without disturbing him, return to Primrose. If he seemed only to be waiting for her, she would say: "Come on, Uncle Minot, I am going to plant me a rose-bush to-day, near the

fountain," or, "My vines have climbed so high on the summer-house I can't reach them. Even Primrose needs a step-ladder for hers. Come and help me."

Sometimes he would walk away just for the delight of having her come for him. It gave him the keenest pleasure he had ever known to hear her approaching as he stood listening for her feet, and to feel her hand slip into his.

June and July passed, and Hilda had not once spoken of the island nor of her mother. Even the asylum seemed to have gone from her mind. Now it happened one day that Mr. Alexander was sitting in the new summer-house reading. Primrose was sewing near by, and, just outside, Hilda was talking to her rose vines.

"Now, Pierre," she was saying, "we are both very beautiful. I know you will have wonderful blossoms some day, and I hope I will, too. Uncle Christopher says I will, and he knows. O dear, I wish we were already clear over the roof, for then we would be grown up, and you could really and truly come to me. If you only knew how I love you, Pierre!"

Primrose glanced at Mr. Alexander and smiled, but he was looking toward Hilda in amazement.

"Hilda, Hilda," he called sharply, "what are you talking about? Who is Pierre?"

There was instant silence outside.

"Aren't you ashamed?" cried Primrose, angrily. "She was just talking to some boy of her fancy. You have frightened her."

She looked at him reproachfully and hurried to Hilda. She found her sitting on the ground, as still as a statue.

"Never mind," she said. "Your Uncle Minot is reading some awful book, I guess, and it made him speak without thinking."

Mr. Alexander watched them through the slats and vines and felt very much ashamed of himself. He saw Hilda peer cautiously at him, and he smiled his apology. She smiled back at once and whispered to Primrose: "He is all right now. My, but he surprised me!"

Mr. Alexander returned to his book, but he could not read. He was sorry he had spoken harshly to Hilda, but he could not forget at once the alarm he had felt.

After a time he said softly, so that Hilda

would not hear: "Primrose, are you sure that she has not made some acquaintances around here? Does she ever stand by the fence and talk to the children on the street?"

"I am sure she does not. Don't you think you are foolish, now? She is too busy all day with father or with me, when you are away."

"No, Primrose, I am not foolish. I want her to be happy. She is getting old enough now to remember. I can see how she matures every day. I don't know that I ought to send her even to the convent, but she ought not to be kept penned in here. There, at least, she will have none but young girls and the sisters about her. But no boys, Primrose—we must not let her know any boys."

Primrose laughed.

"That is all right," he said, smiling; "but boys and girls ought never to see each other. When men and women are forty, they sometimes know what is good for them, and can distinguish between love and the springtime. It is not safe for them to meet before."

He had forgotten Hilda, and spoke with considerable vigour. That evening, as they

were getting the supper, Hilda said to Primrose, —

“What is a convent?”

This question took even Primrose by surprise. She considered for a moment, and replied: —

“It is a great house, like a palace in a garden, much larger and more beautiful than ours. Hundreds of little girls go there and sing and sew and learn how to read.”

“But *must* I go there? I don't want to, Primrose. It seems as if I was always going away.”

“Oh, Hilda, you must not think of it that way. You will never really leave us, you know. You will be our Hilda as long as you live.”

The child ran to her and hid her face in her dress. These two seldom kissed each other, but when they did it meant something. Primrose stooped, and, putting her arms about her, hugged and kissed her good, and her heart was no longer troubled.

Primrose spent most of her time in August sewing. Mr. Alexander had written to Sister Pelagia, simply announcing his adoption of Hilda and his intention of sending her to

the convent in the fall. She replied to his letter as briefly, but she made plain the pleasure she felt in his happiness, and he knew she would take good care of his ward. She enclosed a copy of the "Regulations of wardrobe articles required." He looked at it in astonishment, and took it at once to Primrose. It was a formidable list.

"I will give you the money to buy these things," he said, "if it will not trouble you too much. Can you get them all ready made?"

"The idea," laughed Primrose; "do you suppose I would buy them or let any one else make them? I will get the cloth at once and make every bit of her clothing myself. It is terrible to have her go," she added with a faltering voice. "I will at least know that a trunkful of love goes with her."

Primrose determined that there should be as little grief in Hilda's going as possible. Above all things the child must not feel that she was being sent away. Hilda had brought to her more than two months of supreme happiness. They had understood each other from the first, and every hour had increased the intimacy of their relations. The child

did not know how rare was such a tender and complete affection, and how great the loss of such a companionship would be; but the woman did. And yet the one purpose of Primrose was to create in Hilda a desire to go. She talked to her of the fairies that played in the moonlight in the convent grounds. She told her stories of beautiful nuns, and one of a little princess who went to a convent to live because it was the happiest place in her whole kingdom.

“And just think of all the things you must take with you,—twelve pairs of stockings. Why, I don’t think the princess had as many as that; and two aprons, and three dresses, two pairs of shoes, and six little underskirts, and waists with wide embroidery, and twelve pocket handkerchiefs with your name worked on them in white silk. You will have two long, white veils, flowing almost to your feet, which you will wear when you go to the chapel with all the other little girls in long veils. And a toilet set like the one on my bureau, only new and much prettier.”

“O dear,” Hilda sighed, “I wish I could have all these things and stay here besides.”

“Don't you think the princess was quite happy there? She said she was.”

“But she didn't have you, nor Uncle Minot, nor Uncle Christopher, either.”

“You will take a real silver goblet, and a knife and fork, a table, and a teaspoon, a napkin ring, and six napkins. Then there is the workbox with a strong lock and key. And in the workbox there will be needles and thread, a ball of wax and a thimble, a pair of bright shears and darning cotton.

“And the best thing of all is the portfolio with blue paper and envelopes. For you will learn to write and to read, and we will send long, long letters to each other. You will write to Uncle Minot and get letters from him. I will have Uncle Christopher tell you a new story every evening, and when you read them you will think you are curled up in your end of the bench on the porch.”

When all this had been repeated several times, Hilda began to enjoy it as she would a fairy tale. She ceased to interrupt with wishes and objections and began to make additions of her own. The idea of the letters pleased her, and she would sometimes play at writing one, telling Primrose what she

said. When they went shopping together, and she was allowed to look at everything as long as she wished and to choose what she must have for herself, all her dread of going was forgotten in her delight. Then came the long, happy, busy days, when she sat with Primrose and helped to make the clothes.

At first, when Mr. Alexander found them so engaged, he sat near them, watching with a sorrowful face. But Primrose would not allow this.

“You know how quick she is to respond to the feelings of others. If you are sad, she will grieve. Since she must go, don't you want her to take a light heart with her?”

“You are right,” he said. “I will be cheerful. Can it be,” he said to himself, “that I am jealous of the very happiness I wished for her?”

On the day of the departure Primrose and Hilda rose very early and went into the garden. They walked hand-in-hand along the paths, leaving tender good-bys and tearful kisses for the little cousins and nephews and nieces dwelling in the arbours and bushes. Primrose joined in Hilda's adieus uncon-

sciously. She had at first intended to go with Mr. Alexander and Hilda to the convent, but now that the child was reconciled to the separation, she did not have the courage for the journey, during which she must assume a delight she could not feel. But though she was to remain behind, she was, in reality, taking leave of all these creatures of her fancy with Hilda. Her heart was now with the child and could never again be satisfied with shadows.

“Good-by, good-by,” said Hilda to all the garden. “Good-by,” whispered Primrose to the phantoms.

“You will talk to my rose vines, Primrose, and not let them be lonesome?”

“I will talk to them of you every day. When you come back they will be covered with blooms. I will send you the first bud.”

“Will that be long?”

“Only a little while. You will be here again before we know it.”

But Primrose knew that the Hilda who looked back at her with tearful eyes, and who threw her kisses as long as the carriage was in sight, would never return. A multitude of strangers — strange winds and land-

scapes, strange hopes and sorrows, strange people and desires — would come between them in a year.

The soul is like an inn on the highway and may be leased and transformed by a lodger of a night. And yet there are places here and there where an old guest, returning, finds the chamber he once occupied still known by his name.

CHAPTER VIII

A RIDE of a day and a night brought Mr. Alexander and Hilda to New York. Hilda had found a little girl about her own age on the train with whom she soon established visiting relations. Edna was an only child and possessed something of the premature gravity of those whose first six years are spent entirely with grown folks. She had been a year in school, however, and had become a profound scholar in the eyes of Hilda. She could already read everything in a number of gayly coloured books she produced from her own portmanteau, and very graciously read the stories that accompanied the pictures most pleasing to Hilda. Then she had travelled in trains before and had no fear of walking up and down the long car. She could help herself to water from the little tank at one end, and taught Hilda how to press down the lever and hold her cup under properly. This they did often during

the day. She also knew how to count the telegraph poles. She had learned a number of songs at school and taught them all to Hilda, who picked them up as readily as a bird does the lay of its tribe. They sang, and sang, and swung their legs and sang, oblivious of their smiling audience. Edna's mamma was a beautiful woman; beautiful in the eyes of Hilda and Mr. Alexander, of the Pullman conductor, of the old lady across the aisle, and the drummer, who, wishing to look at her now and then, took a place on a vacant seat behind her where she would not notice it. That is to say, she was lovely in both soul and body. There were times when Hilda was content to just sit quietly near and gaze adoringly into her face. The children were very fair with each other and played hostess or guest in turn.

Mr. Alexander scarcely heeded their coming or going. He was glad that Hilda was happy with her little friend; but this journey, which bore her toward the future, was taking him as swiftly into the past. In a few hours he would be again in the presence of his youth; he would touch the hand and look into the eyes of the girl he had always loved.

He had never seen Mother Pelagia and had no conception of her, but his Betty was always before his eyes. He had forgotten her wilful and imperious ways, and remembered only those times when she had loved him tenderly and without reserve. The fulfilment of his dreams of her was, in part, suggested by Edna's mamma, for in her he could fancy the maturity of Betty's girlish beauty. When she smiled at him now and then as the children sang or played, he acknowledged the sign with a grave inclination of the head; but it brought a melancholy pleasure to his heart. Most men marry, but among the few bachelors of the world are the truest lovers. The man who in his wooing never for a moment ceases to idealize his mistress, seldom wins her. She will lean from her window and listen to his song, but if he would carry her off, he must take her weakness for granted and possess some of the wit of a brigand.

"Hilda," said the lady, "will you and your Uncle Minot eat luncheon with Edna and me? There is enough for us all in our basket."

"Oh, yes," cried Hilda, "I will ask him."

Mr. Alexander returned with her and said: "This is very kind of you, but I think Hilda and I had better go to the dining-car."

"No," she answered. "You must not be so selfish."

"Would you call that selfish?"

"Indeed, I would. You know where you are going and why, and all you care for is to get there as soon as possible and to miss as little as you may of your usual comforts on the way. Now, you may not know it, but the one thing that reconciles a child to a long journey is the lunch box."

"Perhaps you are right," he replied, very glad to take a seat beside her. "Come to think of it, the only thing I remember of my first trip was the cold chicken and doughnuts my mother gave me from her bag."

"Hilda tells me she is going to school at a convent. I am taking Edna to Our Lady of Peace."

"Are you? Hilda goes there, too."

"Oh, Hilda!" exclaimed Edna under her breath, "did you hear that? We will have our houses close together in the nursery, and perhaps Sister Cordelia will let us sleep next

to each other. You will just love Sister Cordelia."

"Well," said the woman, laughing, "my child's name is Edna Wilson."

"Hilda has been given my own name — Alexander."

"You will not be sorry you placed her there. It is a beautiful convent, and the sisters in charge of the school are just happy, light-hearted children grown up. Most of them entered the convent when they were young girls, and they seem to think that all the world is just like their own hearts. The sisters who take care of the children and who teach have all been selected first for their lovely natures, and then taught music and literature and drawing and whatever is required to fit them for instructors. If you wish only innocence and happiness and beauty to surround a child, the convent of Our Lady of Peace is the place for her. Do you think it is better to bring up a child ignorant of misery and evil?"

"Indeed, I do."

"I really don't believe it makes any difference. A man or a woman must learn to choose the good, and it is as difficult to do

that in one place as another. It is not the beauty that is thrust upon us that counts, but only what we acquire. My mother was brought up in a convent and ran away with my father two weeks after she came out. But fortunately he was a good man and they were happy. My aunt, her only sister, was a harum-scarum girl, I am told, and yet, after breaking the hearts of some score of lovers, she entered the convent we are now going to and has become its reverend mother."

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Alexander with a start, "are you the daughter of Betty's little sister?"

"You don't mean," gasped Mrs. Wilson, "that you are that Mr. Alexander I have always heard about?"

Most of us cherish a family romance of which we have heard hints and whispers. Perhaps we have even caught a glimpse of our end of it—the uncle who has shot his rival; the aunt who eloped with a sailor who was lost at sea; but it rarely comes to us to meet the mysterious, the dreaded, the only-to-be-mentioned-in-whispers other one that figured in this old affair.

So Mrs. Wilson stared and dropped her eyes, and blushed and stared again.

"The daughter of Betty's little sister," murmured Mr. Alexander. But even now he could not realize it. He still saw his sweetheart, younger than this woman before him, by ten years.

"And there are apples there so big," said Edna, "and there is a squirrel out by the grotto so tame that he comes and takes things right out of my hand."

"Oh, does he? Do you suppose he would me, too?"

"Of course he will," said Edna, emphatically. "I'll just tell him to."

That night the two children slept in the same berth. They went to sleep in each other's arms, whispering of all they would do together, and how they would love each other forever and ever.

The next morning, as Hilda looked from the ferry up and down the river they were crossing, a strange feeling of sorrow came to her. She forgot where she was going, and even the presence of those about her whom she knew. She seemed to be suddenly alone and far away. It was her first

touch of that homesickness which steals over the heart even when there is every reason for content. She looked at the wonderful city before her and felt that she ought not to be going there — alone. It was only a passing feeling and she, of course, could not have told the reason for it, nor who nor what she missed, but it was none the less significant for that. The drive through the city and along the country road near the river was full of excitement for both her and Edna. Everything they saw was wonderful. They expected to see the marvellous on every hand, and it was there. They felt that they were missing even more than they saw, and therein lay the secret of their enchantment. As soon as the country was reached, Edna was sure that the convent lay just beyond each bend in the road. It was not long before they really reached it and turned in between the great stone columns of the gateway. There was a little ivy-covered lodge at the entrance that reminded Hilda for a moment of Primrose and the cottage. Then came a long winding gravel road, — “The Way of the Holy Angels,” that took them through a deep wood, past an open grove

in the midst of which were a group of ponds, surrounding a broad knoll, where stood the grotto of "Our Lady of Lourdes." Presently they heard a babble of voices and saw some thirty girls in a great orchard to their left. Some were in the trees, and as they shook the branches, heavy with fruit, the apples fell in showers into the long grass. A number of the smaller children recognized Edna, and shouting to her, ran after the carriage, holding tight to their aprons filled with spoil. A stone wall skirted the right of the road, and rolling away from this was a low hill that hid the convent until a sharp turn brought the majestic buildings suddenly into full view. At the foot of a long, grassy slope was the Hudson, extending as far to the north as the eye could see. Across the wide river rose the Palisades, where the deep green of the trees was plainly mottled with the colours of autumn. The meanest soul could not come upon such a scene as this without some emotion. Mr. Alexander stood upon the porch of the convent, hat in hand, and gazed around him. Just below him was a terrace, at the foot of which ran "The Car-

dinal's Walk." Here were marble statues of the saints, with flaming beds of salvias and marigolds and cannas in between. A fountain, supported by marble angels, was playing in the centre of the walk. The great sloping lawn bore a few fine trees. Summer-houses and benches were placed at points where the view was good. Here he saw a number of the sisters sitting, reading, conversing, or tranquilly looking out upon the river. Two of them were at the farther side of the lawn, in a little grove of maples, stooping now and then for a finely coloured leaf. The only sounds in all that vast scene were the call of the birds, the voices of the children, and the water of the fountain. Presently from the great clock far above him, came twelve deep strokes. It was noon. The Angelus was sounded, and a moment after he heard from the depths of the building the tinkle of smaller bells. But none of these sounds seemed to break the silence. They were the calm, sweet voices of the Spirit dwelling there.

Mr. Alexander followed Mrs. Wilson and the children into the convent. As he stood in the dim corridors, before the sister who

had come to receive them, he found it difficult to speak.

"I would like to see Mother Pelagia," he said, handing her his card. Mrs. Wilson put her hand on his arm, gently saying, "I will look after the children."

"Mamma, O mamma," cried Edna, joyfully, "here is Sister Cordelia."

"And who is this?" said the sister, taking Edna's hand and coming at once toward Hilda.

"That is Hilda. And, Sister, can she have her things in the nursery and her bed next to mine? And we want to sit together at the table, and everything; may we, Sister?"

"But how about Polly?" asked the sister, smiling. "She came yesterday, and has been just homesick for you."

"But can't Polly be next to us, too?"

"We will try to arrange it that way. Shall we go to the nursery now? All your friends are there expecting you. They came running in and told me you were here."

"Where is mamma?" Edna asked, with a sudden glance of apprehension about her. She remembered something like this before, when going with Sister Cordelia to the nur-

sery. She had not seen her mother again for almost a year.

"Where is mamma?" she said again in affright, for she did not see her.

"Here I am," came a tearful voice from the shadows, and her mother came toward her.

"Oh, mamma, don't leave me again! Don't go! You won't, will you?"

"But I must, you know. You will be very happy here, Edna, and you must not cry now. Don't you see that Hilda is a stranger here? She has no mamma at all. You must take care of her, dear."

Hilda had been, from her first entrance, affected by the silence and solemnity of this shadowy and mysterious place. It was certainly not fear that oppressed her; there was nothing here to inspire that even in a child. She had been attracted toward Sister Cordelia by her face and voice; but she wondered at her black robes, the girdle of beads, the pendent cross, and the black bonnet. She glanced timidly about her and was afraid she would cry. When Edna called for her mamma, and then gave voice to her grief and fright, she turned and ran to Mr. Alexander.

She did not speak, but took his hand and pressed close beside him.

He stroked her hair, scarcely thinking of her.

"Don't you think you can like me, Hilda?" said Sister Cordelia. Hilda smiled at her shyly and nodded.

"I think you can, too." She held out her hand and said, "Will you come with me now?"

Hilda looked up at Mr. Alexander.

"Yes," he said absently; "go now with the sister."

Then, as he was recalled to the present and the fact that she was leaving him, he added tenderly: "Good-by, little one. If you love me, be happy. That is all I ask."

The child moved quietly away, her lips trembling a little.

"See," said Mrs. Wilson, "Hilda does not cry, and she has no mamma. Will you let her go down to the children without you?"

"Sister Cordelia," called Edna, plaintively, "please wait for me. I am coming, Sister. Oh, Hilda," she said between her half-stifled sobs, "we must not cry; must we, Sister?"

"I don't want to," said Hilda; but the effort to speak seemed to loose her tears, and the two children, each holding a hand of the sister, passed down the steps to the basement, their faces wet even as they protested that they must not cry.

So they came to the door of the nursery. Hilda stopped short in the midst of a sob and opened her eyes in wonder that quickly changed to joy. Never had she seen such a sight before. No chamber in the ogre's palace had held such delights. Before her was a little room filled with sunlight, that came through two windows reaching from floor to ceiling, and looking out upon a green hillside. Along the walls were ranged two rows of boxes, which she could see at a glance were houses furnished with wonderful completeness and elegance. Most of these houses were empty now, for the inhabitants and most of the movable furniture were in the middle of the floor. There were twelve little rocking chairs, with a doll in each. There were dolls sitting propped against tables, and dolls stretched out on the floor. There were great fat dolls with blooming faces and masses of yellow curls, and olive-complexioned dolls

with coal-black hair. And such dresses! The whole room danced with the gleam and glint from the silks and satins of crimson, blue, and yellow. Here was a little sewing machine, and there a wardrobe with its doors open, revealing skirts and underskirts, waists and hats and cloaks and jackets. Here was a wonderful dwelling house, the palace of a princess, five stories high, with doors and windows and cupolas, and there a spinning-wheel and reel. These, and numberless other marvels, — such as tables set for tea, and a washing on a line, and writing desks, and flat-irons, and quilting frames, — were what she saw, not, of course, as I have named them, in detail, but as a grand and bewildering whole, the view one would get of it in a single glance. For as soon as they appeared in the doorway, they were greeted by Polly and Edith and Maggie and Rose and Susie and Nellie and May.

They gathered about Edna with eager questions, and received Hilda into their midst without reserve.

Polly was jealous for one brief moment, but it could not last. She agreed at once that Hilda should have her place on the

other side of Edna, and should be in all things their sworn friend and abetter.

“But you will let me show her the oratory, won't you?” said Nellie. “And I want the chapel,” said Edith. “I will take her to St. Thomas's Circle,” said Susie. “Can I have the grotto?” asked Rose. “Come on,” cried Maggie, “let's all take her out to the orchard. The big girls will get all the apples.”

A chorus of assent greeted this proposition, and the suggestion at the end of it acted as a whip. Sister Cordelia saw them scamper away, almost forgetting Hilda in their eagerness, and marvelled for the thousandth time at the innocence and shrewdness, the affection and thoughtlessness, of children.

As Mr. Alexander waited in a little room decorated in blue and gold and lighted by a window overlooking the lawns, he heard a faint, sweet melody. A sister was playing a hymn on the great organ in the chapel, and the strains, passing through the thick walls and along the high corridors, came to him like the purified music we sometimes hear in dreams. As he waited and listened, he saw a slender, black-robed figure coming quickly toward him through the dark corri-

dor. He knew it was a nun and his heart stood still, for it might be Betty. When she entered the bright room and stood before him, however, he saw a little old lady with white hair showing beneath her quaint bonnet. He bowed gravely and looked away.

"My friend," said the nun, softly, "did you wish to see Mother Pelagia? I am she."

He started, stood up, stared for a moment into the wrinkled, faded face before him, and, dropping his eyes, said not a word. She stood quietly watching him, a twinkle in her own eyes, still bright and penetrating.

"Well," she said presently, "are you sorry you came?"

He looked at her now and smiled.

"No," he said slowly; "but I was surprised."

"I told you she was dead, but you would not believe me. You have been for forty years faithful to the memory of a —"

"Don't speak unkindly of her," he interrupted. "She is not dead. When I die you may say a mass for her soul and speak of her as you wish. Until then I will protect her."

"Dear friend, I never close a prayer without a thought of you. When we meet in

paradise, if I can there believe myself to be as good and beautiful as you think Betty, I will ask God to allow me to love and honour you above all the angels."

There was something very sweet and almost pathetic in her face as she bade him good-by, and there was also a suggestion of a twinkle in her eyes. He felt again the old restlessness and uncertainty when in her presence, but he would not recognize the fact. He was still bewildered by the shock he had received when she first appeared, and was really relieved when she called Mrs. Wilson in and left them alone together.

"My aunt is a wonderful woman," said she. "Her step is as brisk and her eye as clear as a girl's. She is clever, too—any one can see that."

A sister entered and took them to a room overlooking the fountain. A table near the window was spread with a luncheon of milk and bread and fruit. He scarcely ate, but sat idly gazing over the lawn beneath him, or up the river to where the Palisades formed a bold headland, whose noble outline was softened by a purple mist. It was as sublime and beautiful a picture as the world has

to offer. It lessened his sorrow, but increased his melancholy. He sighed and looked away.

"If you are ready," he said to Mrs. Wilson, "we will go."

"But you only saw her for a moment," she exclaimed. "Won't she return?"

"I think not," he replied. "Let us go."

It had been but a moment, and yet, during it, he had seen the passing of forty years. He bent a little as he walked to the carriage. It was the first time in his life; but he realized now, for the first time, that he was really old.

CHAPTER IX

THESE were the days before the spirit of Froebel had been reincarnated into the body of the schools. The world's children were still being driven in herds along the beaten paths of fact, the dust from which only choked them and made their eyes smart. Here and there, however, were child-herds who, prompted as much by compassion as wisdom, let down the bars or led their droves over the fences into the fields, allowing them to gather the flowers and the fruit of knowledge at first hand.

Sister Cordelia was one of these. Every evening, the children, after their glass of milk, went to the nursery, and, rocking in their chairs, put their babies to sleep, singing the songs the sister had taught them. Then, kneeling at their chairs and facing a little image of the Holy Child, robed in turquoise blue with gold braid, they said their Hail Marys.

The beauty of this graceful image, the tender innocence of the thoughtful face, was, in itself, worthy of their devotions. Every moment they spent looking upon it with affection and desire was something gained.

“And now,” Sister Cordelia would say, “we will finish all our letters and get them ready to post.”

From every child's pocket would come a pencil and pad on which had been scrawled or printed, from time to time through the day, whatever had come to them, or had been suggested by the sister, of what they were doing or thinking or seeing, for the daily letter home. They would make as nice copies of these as they could, and, addressing and stamping their own, drop them in a little box near the door. Each child had her day to be postman. She would carry the key of this box, and when the real postman from the city rode in on his horse in the morning, she must unlock it and take the letters to him. In this way they were taught to write.

Hilda suffered terribly at first because she was the only one of her playmates who could not.

“But,” said Sister Cordelia, “just think,

Hilda, how nice it will be for us all to teach you."

The sister made so much of this that the children came to look upon it as the rarest of their pleasures. Edna was inclined to claim it as her special privilege at first, but the sister showed her how selfish this would be.

"But," she added, "until she learns, you may write her letters for her."

So Edna carried two pads in her pocket, and Hilda's need made her the most popular of all the children there.

When the letters were dropped in the box, Sister Cordelia waited for the last good night of the doting parents to their babes, and took them off to bed. They stopped on the third floor and entered the children's oratory, a long, narrow room in white and pale blue, with windows of glass stained in light tints. The walls were decorated by vines of trailing arbutus in bloom, exquisitely painted by some of the older girls of the school, whose names were graven in silver on a tablet just opposite the door. At one end was a white marble shrine to the Virgin, where a slender sanctuary lamp was always burning, and

potted plants were in flower. Here the children knelt, if they desired, and offered any special request or prayer of their own they wished to make.

Now, as the weeks passed, there came a change in the relations of Hilda and Edna. They were always together, sometimes even wandering a little way from the others to sit alone in the grotto or under a tree on the lawn or a bench in a summer-house. Sister Cordelia noticed that at these times Edna would usually produce the two pads, and she was pleased to see their heads close together, thinking them busy as they should be.

Little by little, however, Edna began to reveal signs of unhappiness. Sometimes she would jump up from her seat abruptly and walk away, leaving Hilda to follow her, very much perplexed by her behaviour. One day Edna left her in the grotto, and, hurrying away into the woods, threw herself on the ground. Hilda followed her slowly, carrying the pads she had thrown from her angrily.

"Go away!" cried Edna, passionately. "I don't want you to come near me. Go away!"

Hilda turned about with a cry of distress and ran sobbing as fast as she could to the

orchard where, hidden in the long grass, she thought she could lie and weep unseen.

"Oh, why does she do it?" she moaned. "O dear! O dear! what have I done?"

"Come, Hilda," said Sister Cordelia, bending over her, "will you tell me what it is?"

"Oh, I don't know what it is. Edna don't like me any more."

The sister helped her up and dried her eyes and comforted her with the assurance that everybody there loved her very much.

"Maybe Edna is sick," she added. "Will you not cry any more and let me go and see?"

"Oh, Sister," said Hilda, anxiously, "please go quick. I don't want her to be there all alone."

The sister found Edna still stretched on the ground.

"Dear Edna," said she very gently, "are you unhappy?"

There was no answer.

"Are you sick?" she asked, really frightened now and stepping quickly toward her.

"No," said Edna, sitting up, for she did not want to be touched.

"You have made Hilda miserable."

Edna looked stubbornly upon the ground and said nothing.

"I am very sorry," said the sister, and the anxiety that she really felt trembled in her voice. "Don't you care any more to become a child of Mary?"

Edna did not move or speak, but a look of sudden distress and alarm passed over her face. The little breast began to pain her, and she unconsciously pressed it with her hands.

"Sister," she said presently, with a choking voice, "I wish I could be good."

"Come, then, let us go and find Hilda."

All that afternoon Edna seemed to be on the point of weeping. She sat quietly among the children, but took no part in their play. For some days she had not entered the oratory, but had stood gloomily outside while the others were there. This had caused Sister Cordelia a good deal of distress, but she knew it was better not to question her, if it was possible to solve this problem without.

This evening, however, Edna entered and went quickly to the shrine. She knelt down, hid her face in her hands, crying bitterly. The children looked at her and forgot their

own prayers. Hilda began to cry unconsciously. Sister Cordelia could not endure such a sight and do nothing. She knelt by Edna, and, putting her arms about her, said:—

“Please tell me, too. Dear little girl, won’t you tell me? Perhaps I can help you to understand what the Virgin is saying.”

“Oh, Sister,” sobbed the child, “I have been angry at Hilda because she always thinks of the nicest things for her letters, and—O dear—O dear—yesterday—I could not help it—I sent hers to my mamma and mine to Primrose.”

All this was said brokenly and in the keenest anguish. The children listened aghast at this strange confession. Before it was finished, Hilda was on her feet.

“Oh, Edna,” she wailed, “I didn’t know. Indeed, I didn’t. I will never, never do it again,” and running to her friend she fell into her arms.

That night they received permission to sleep in the same bed. When they awoke, it was to a warmer and sweeter friendship than before.

The letters of Hilda to Primrose, to Uncle

Minot, and to Uncle Christopher were the most important of the world's documents to all in the garden. Every evening as they assembled on the porch or in the summer-house, or, as it grew colder, about the fire-place in the cottage, the day's letter was read aloud and marvelled at.

"Do you suppose she could have said that?" Mr. Mott would ask.

"Of course she did," Primrose would reply, and Mr. Alexander would suggest that she may have thought it, and that Sister Cordelia had helped her to put it into words. Then Mr. Mott would tell his story as Primrose wrote it down, Mr. Alexander would send his love and wishes for her happiness, and Primrose would complete the letter with a budget of news of her little friends in house and garden. She began also to write to the child of all she thought and did during the day. Could these letters of Primrose and Hilda some time be published with a key to them, such as they possessed, the world would be kept busy for a while; for could it read, as they read, it would see not merely what was said, but all that a child and a woman, like Hilda and Primrose, think and feel.

So when the summer came and brought Hilda to the garden again, it seemed to Primrose that she, too, had been away and was returning with her. For the first time now, Hilda was restless and not altogether engrossed by her surroundings. She walked with Mr. Alexander or went riding with him when he wished. She still delighted in the stories of her Uncle Christopher and loved Primrose even more dearly than before, but she seemed now and then to be listening for what she did not hear, and to be thinking of things far away. It was an unconscious, ever present hunger, not to be satisfied even by the flowers. She seldom visited her rose vines, although they were now in bloom, and never talked to them. If she went by herself at all, it was just to walk aimlessly along the gravel paths with a sense of loss filling her heart.

“She misses the children,” thought Primrose. The others did not notice it.

But when Hilda was again in the convent, it was not the greetings of her friends that set the little moulting birds to singing in her soul. It was the sound of the chapel organ as she heard it while passing along the cor-

ridors. It was the tinkling of the little bells, the deep tones of the clock, the mysterious shadows, and, above all, the broad, stately river, stretching far and far away. It was not the longing to go there that lured her gaze beyond the purple headland. She was content just to sit with Edna, or even alone, and look and feel.

Now, when she tried to write to Primrose, she found a strange, new difficulty. She would sit for a long time, her pad on her lap, her pencil in her hand, trying in vain to find some way of expressing what she wished to say. She was obliged to frequently seek assistance from Edna, whose imagination never carried her too far from the familiar shores. Primrose felt the change in her letters, and it grieved her. When Hilda was again home for the summer, she was quieter than before. She was neither so restless nor yet so much interested in her surroundings. She would sit by herself in apparent listless idleness, or, curled up in the summer-house, now covered with vines, read by the hour. She found as great a pleasure as ever in helping Primrose with the work, and it was then that something of their former intimacy re-

turned. But Primrose could not be sure any longer of the child's thoughts. She longed to brush away the veil that was enveloping her; to catch her in her arms, and by a close embrace bring her all back into her life again.

One day this was accomplished for her. For one sweet and bitter hour the child's soul was thrown open to her again.

They were sitting together in the summer-house. She was finishing an apron that Hilda had begun. The child was reading near her. Now and then, as she read, a sigh escaped her. Primrose saw that her cheeks were flushed and heard her murmuring to herself, "O dear! O dear!" She tried to think of something to propose that would be sufficient to take Hilda from the story. Suddenly the book fell from her hand. She leaned back for a moment and closed her eyes.

"Whatever is it?" cried Primrose, hurrying to her.

"Primrose," said Hilda, looking pitifully into her face, "I had a mamma once and she died. Oh, Primrose, do you think they put her in the ground? Did she suffer and suffer, and was she very sick?"

“Do you remember your mamma?” asked Primrose, gently sitting beside her and pushing the book under the bench with her foot.

“Oh, yes, Primrose. She was more beautiful than Edna’s mamma — more beautiful than any one ever was. She told me she was going away, just like Mary’s mother told her in the story. She didn’t go away, Primrose, she died; and when I wasn’t there, they put her in the ground and came away, and she is dead.”

Hilda leaned against Primrose and wept so long and bitterly that Primrose became frightened.

“Hilda, Hilda,” she said at last, “you must not cry so. I can’t carry you, child, and I can’t leave you. I will have to call your Uncle Christopher.”

“No — no — don’t — don’t — do — it.”

At that moment Mr. Alexander came through the opening in the hedge of the enclosure.

“Your Uncle Minot is coming,” said Primrose.

Hilda was still for a moment, but she could not entirely control her sobs.

“Don't let him see,” she whispered.

Primrose motioned him to go back. He nodded and smiled and went away, thinking there was some little trouble that would be forgotten in a moment.

He saw that Hilda was passing from childhood to girlhood, and was satisfied with her. She seemed in his eyes to be only a little taller than before. She was the same Hilda, — affectionate, light-hearted, and happy. He sometimes heard her singing as she worked. He saw her sitting contentedly with her book, and wondered at the rapidity of her progress. He marvelled at all she said, and took his greatest delight in gratifying her desires. She liked pretty clothes and such story books as she could read. These seemed to him to be all that she wished for, and he gave them to her with a lavish hand.

“Beautiful women are the world's finest ornaments,” he would say to himself. “She is a happy child of nature, and she shall deck herself as gayly as the flowers.”

He looked forward to the time when she would sit beside him, beautiful and happy, and delight with him in his books, or sing to him, or tell him her dreams and fancies. She

should then have no vain longings if he could realize them for her.

He would sit in this manner and muse in his room or in the club, on the cottage porch, and, all the long winter evenings, by the cheery fireplace with Primrose and his old friend, Mott. He became more and more unmindful of their presence as the image of Hilda, the maiden, became more real. To be sure, he sometimes called her Betty in his silent talks. But that did not matter. This being of his dreams, by either name, possessed only the virtues and beauty of both.

When Hilda, now in her sixth year of school, wrote to ask him if she could take her first communion, he replied:—

“Do what you wish, my dear. I shall never deny you anything but the privilege of grief. That is something we often desire, but can do without. Be happy. Have no lover but your uncle, and I will agree to anything you wish. Should you become a nun, I will have you assigned by the archbishop to read to me, and we will build a little convent for just ourselves and Primrose. Your Uncle Christopher shall be our gardener, which, I suppose, will compel us to build our convent here.”

CHAPTER X

YEAR by year the shadow of the sun-dial on the convent lawn had described a circle of the hours, and the great bell in the clock tower had announced their coming.

The little girls of the nursery a few years before were the big girls now. That was all. Hilda and Edna and Polly had finished their last year in the convent. The next morning they would pack their trunks. In the evening they would drive away. They were now sitting for the last time in the summer-house, taking their last look on the river and lawn. Here they had conned their lessons and read aloud together, from Mother Goose and Hans Andersen to Marcus Aurelius and Byron and Shelley. Here they had talked of what they read from the "O mys!" and "O dears!" to the later "How beautiful!" "Is that so?" and "I think." For them, as for us all, the beautiful things of their books were those scenes in which moved beings they could love; or were those thoughts that

fall like sunshine into shadowy places, or that come reaching toward us like the path of moonlight across the dark waters, or, appearing like stars, stir the wings of the soul for flight. They questioned, as do we all, the things that would imprison them. They thought, and thought, in the endeavour to remain free and to reconcile what they were told was good with what they felt to be beautiful. And because, in this, the world is like them—its virtues are becoming more divine.

“Girls,” said Polly, “let’s not go away. We may not see each other for years—perhaps never. I will stay here for a week, if you will.”

“That would be lovely,” said Edna; “just lovely.”

“We will do it,” said Hilda, laughing and putting her hand to her eyes. “I shall not have to cry now for a week at least.”

“There will be no school,” said Polly. “Just think of being here a whole week with nothing we *must* do.”

“We can finish our story now,” said Hilda, “and perhaps find the right conclusion for that wonderful poem of ours.”

"I wish we could," said Edna.

"Well, I don't," Polly cried gayly. "I am tired of waiting in silent awe while Hilda sits mooning at the 'purple headland,' and you nibble your pencil and twist your hair and grow red in the face. When you take to literature again, I shall devote myself to Father L'Amora."

"You're a mean thing!" said Hilda.

"Well," retorted Polly, "I will take Father Richter, then, and give you Father L'Amora."

"You know I didn't mean that. If you would use your imagination, Polly, to some purpose, you could help finish the poem."

"Well," said Polly, with a grave air, "as I understand it, your maiden is being borne in a boat up the Hudson on a misty moonlight night. A phantom stands silently in the bow. The headland is just before them, and the maiden knows that some strange and wonderful thing will happen as soon as they have passed it."

"Yes," said Hilda, eagerly. "That is all just as clear as it can be to me. But I can't see beyond the headland. Sometimes it seems that there is a city there, just rising out of the water and formed of the blue mist

and white clouds; and then I think that instead of the city there are beautiful green islands, where the fairies live and the birds stay in winter, for it is always spring on these islands, and everything that grows has a blossom and can sing. But I never really know what is there."

"Why don't you row up and see?" asked Polly. "You could do it in a week if the wind blew north."

"Polly," said Edna, "if those sisters were not coming this way I would throw my book at you."

Hilda, however, scarcely heard. She smiled and said, "Now, Polly, you're a goose," but her eyes kept their wistful look, and the smile only made the melancholy of the young face more mature and tender.

"Well," said Polly, "tell me this, then, and I will help you, really. Who is the phantom?"

"I don't know what it is," said Hilda. "I wish I did."

"I didn't ask you *what* it is. I know that well enough."

"You do?" asked Hilda in surprise, and looking at her eagerly. "What is it?"

“It’s a boy,” said Polly, with an emphatic nod.

Hilda looked quickly away, confused.

“Why, Hilda, how you blush,” said Edna. “Is it really so? Did you meet one, too, last summer?”

“Oh, Edna,” exclaimed Polly, “and you never told me! Tell me about him now, and I’ll tell you about mine.”

“Hilda’s first,” said Edna. “It started with her.”

“Yes, Hilda, own up — who is the phantom?”

“You are wrong, Polly. I don’t know any boys.”

“What a pity!”

“I have scarcely ever spoken to one in my life except —”

“Except who?”

“One I played with a long time ago — ten years.”

She could not at that moment recall his name. It had been years since she had pronounced it.

“My children,” said Mother Pelagia, who had come upon them unawares, “are you saying good-by to the river? I shall be

sorry to see you go. Every year my blossoms blow away and I see little of the fruit, for it ripens in other hands. I hope you will come back here now and then and not grow up to forget us."

"But, Mother," said Polly, "we would like to stay here a week longer, if we may."

"Dear Mother Pelagia," said Hilda, going to her and taking her hand, "may we stay? It will be our last time together, perhaps."

"You know, my dear, that I could refuse you nothing, even if I wished to. I shall, however, be very happy to have you here."

She smiled on the three and turned away.

"Sister Cordelia," said she, as they continued their walk, "I have loved those girls more than any of the others. Perhaps I should not have done that, and I hope no one has seen it but myself." She added a moment later, as if it were an after-thought, "and our Lord."

"He would not mind," said Sister Cordelia, softly. "He alone is able to love every one."

"He may love us all," replied the mother, smiling; "but I fancy there are those whom even He cannot admire."

She looked toward a little white house among the trees, the home of the chaplain, Father Richter. Sister Cordelia followed her glance and smiled also, for she was the one person in the world with whom Mother Pelagia was not always politic.

They saw Father Richter on the porch, frowning over a prayer-book.

"There he sits," said the mother, "like a crow in a nest more befitting a wren. He certainly knows the catechism, but I wish we had Father L'Amora for our chaplain, for he knows our Lord as well."

"Oh, I wish that could be. Why don't you speak to the Archbishop?"

"I am getting too old for such adventures," said the mother, a little sorrowfully and then with a quaint smile, "I will soon be gone and the world must learn to get along without me."

The long shadows were falling across the lawn. The bell in the tower sounded its melodious summons over woods and groves and far along the paths, calling the girls and the sisters to vespers. A little procession of nuns came, two by two, along the Way of the Holy Angels, saying their rosaries. The

mother and Sister Cordelia, as they returned, saw the old Monseignor Ambrose hurrying along the Cardinal's Walk. He had been a moment before placidly listening to the birds and examining the bushes as he passed them in his stroll. Now there was an eager expression on his face. The kind of anxiety shone there, however, that illuminates and makes beautiful. He quickened his steps, that he might not miss the first notes of the organ. Seeing the sisters, he removed his black skull cap and allowed them to precede him. Now, as he followed slowly, a little behind them, his countenance became tranquil. He was in a beautiful chapel of his own building, listening to the melodies of ninety years.

“How can Father Richter live in the same house with the monseignor,” asked Sister Cordelia, “and remain so austere?”

“I do not know. I once heard the father say to him, ‘Some of these young girls seem to have nothing to confess. What can I do?’—‘If I were you,’ came the reply, ‘I would pray for a continuance of their innocence and peace.’—‘In one of them especially,’ continued the father, as if the other

had not spoken, 'I have never been able to awaken the consciousness of sin.'—'Why not leave that to the devil?' returned the monseignor.

"I understand there has been some estrangement between them since."

The especial one to whom Father Richter had referred was Polly. She had learned her catechism early and had been always ready to rattle through it, were the questions asked in order. She was willing enough to attend mass and confession. She confessed if she could think of anything on the spur of the moment, or failed to do so with equal good grace. When she went into retreat, she would try to think of holy things. She would come out with a headache and say,—

"It is like attempting for three days to keep your mind's eye on a dot."

Upon Edna the forms and symbols of the church made a deeper impression. She had always felt a wondering adoration for the Virgin and for Our Lady of Lourdes. She had offered a real prayer every night at the shrine in the oratory ever since the one dark time when she had remained away. She never romped in the grotto, nor on the island

around it, for fear of disturbing the peace of the sweet-faced image within. There were times when she grieved in secret over her depravity, and other times when she hinted to Hilda of the fears that filled her soul.

Hilda was neither altogether indifferent, nor yet very deeply disturbed by such fears. She was distressed by her failure to find a confession ready when the time came, simply because she felt that the stern father expected one from her. Now and then the lines of the catechism would rise like ghosts before her, but like ghosts they were vague and unintelligible and did not remain. When she was a child, the questions of the father had sometimes frightened her as she knelt in the dark confessional, listening to the solemn voice of one unseen. She never quite outgrew this feeling, and still strove when she was there to find such answers as would be acceptable to him. This had some effect upon her, but not a profound one. Only now and then, when a sudden wave of longing or of causeless melancholy swept through her soul, would she wonder if she was indeed sinful and approaching unconsciously the dark waters waiting to engulf her.

In the dim light of the chapel she would sometimes listen to the organ and forget it in a tender, half-unconscious prayer. She did not know what she felt nor what she wanted.

Sometimes she would sit on the lawn alone until the dark fell about her, watching the far-away light, above the city, down the river, half remembering, half dreaming, until, awaking with a start, she would find her cheeks wet with tears. On all these things she was silent. She could listen to Edna and feel with her; but of her own misgivings and memories she never consciously spoke.

The academy had been dismissed. A few of the girls had remained. Sisters from all parts of the world were returning to the convent for the summer. Now came long retreats, seasons of meditation, frequent and solemn services.

There were still a few of the sisters, not so withdrawn from all earthly communion, with whom the girls could walk and talk when they wished.

Among these were the two whom they most loved, — Sister Cordelia, their former angel of the nursery, but now the mother's

assistant, and Sister Melita, who gave them lessons on the harp.

A few miles from the convent was a college and monastery. From here came the priests who assisted in the special services of this season. But of all those who came, the most popular was Father L'Amora, the poet. He was now a little past forty, but he was one of those, like the monseignor, whose years are not recorded. Handsome, keen, and gentle, he was profoundly loved by every one, from the archbishop, who allowed him many liberties which he whimsically called poetic licenses, to the simple old sisters who only appeared, when the sun was warm, to bask and doze in a little garden for their own use. He would often sit here with them and read from a prayer-book in his most soothing voice. When they slept, he would bring a copy of Shelley or of Burns or even a romance, such as "Don Quixote" or "Carmen," from his cassock and make the shift without a break to disturb them.

When he was seen entering the grounds, the message flew from lip to lip, and he was surrounded by the girls who ran to meet him. His supply of stories never waned.

He would sit in the grove for an afternoon and discuss with them the sayings of the philosophers, the lives of the famous or the beautiful, or delve with them into the history of nations. In the evening, he would sit with them on the lawn and tell them stories or sing them old ballads. These songs and stories were so good that Father Richter disapproved of them. On one occasion, he had complained to the archbishop after notifying L'Amora of his purpose.

"He recounts to our young ladies," wrote the father, "alluring romances of earthly love, and I can see by their flushed faces as they listen that their sinful hearts are inflamed."

This letter brought an invitation to L'Amora to meet the archbishop at the convent.

"I am coming," wrote his reverence, "to hear one of your stories, and I hope, as the ride is quite long, that you will find something alluring for the occasion."

Something had prevented the coming of the archbishop at that time, but now he made a visitation to the convent and sent word to L'Amora.

No one, of course, but the three most

interested, knew anything of the complaint or of the archbishop's reply.

"Now," said he, as he took Father Richter's arm, and walked from among the trees toward the seats arranged for the little company on the lawn, "we will listen and decide."

"How the leaves shine in the moonlight," murmured Monseignor Ambrose, who walked at the bishop's left.

"Ambrose," asked his reverence, "how do you find these romances of L'Amora?"

"Very pleasing," he replied, innocent of the frown on Father Richter's face.

"Father Richter," asked the bishop, anxiously, "are you afraid our young brother will modify his story on my account?"

"Understanding, as he does," came the grave reply, "that it is to be told as a trial before your reverence, he will not. He is an honourable brother."

His reverence looked relieved.

CHAPTER XI

"OH, girls," cried Hilda, as they met in the corridor after vespers, "Father L'Amora is to tell a story on the lawn, and the archbishop is to be there. Sister Melita just told me. She has sent for the gardener to carry her harp outside."

"I am sorry the bishop is here," pouted Polly, "for now I can't hold Father L'Amora's hand."

"Why," said Hilda, "have you an engagement with the bishop?"

"Good heavens, girls," said Edna, "some one will hear us! Let's dress."

"I wish we had our ball gowns here," said Polly. "You and Edna have such beautiful shoulders I just love to look at them. We might cut our muslins low for to-night. Shall I get the shears?"

As the little company assembled, the three girls came hand in hand down the walk, out from the shadows of the convent and the

trees and across the lawn in the moonlight, like three rosy-cheeked ghosts. They seated themselves on the ground by Father L'Amora. Sister Melita touched the strings of the harp. The girls whispered together a moment, and then to Sister Cordelia, and running to a syringa bush near by, picked enough of the flowering stems for two wreaths, one of which they placed on the head of Father L'Amora. They removed the black bonnet, and with the other crowned Sister Melita.

"How young she looks," they whispered, "and how sweet!"

Now the harp and the fountain and the breeze formed a trio. When it ceased, Father L'Amora said:—

"The story I will tell you was written by me a long time ago when I was curate at the Church of Our Lady, in a little village on the Maumee. I can vouch for the truth of this tale because I used to sit in the twilight on the banks of the river, and, while I could see them distinctly from where I sat, I never got close enough to the people or happenings I describe to discredit them. I have memorized portions of this story, and will trust to

these young ladies, as I have often before, to help me safely over the spaces in between. You will see, your reverence, how their eyes become like stars to guide me if I stumble."

Polly patted his hand. The bishop smiled benignly, and Father L'Amora began his story.

* * * * *

Little Pierre was the adopted son of an old fisherman, who, with his pretty young wife, lived on an island, as fair a farm of a hundred acres as the eye of a contented proprietor ever found delight in. It belonged to Jean Pilliod, who, because the father of Pierre was a countryman, had allowed him to take possession of a sheltered corner. Pierre Prevost, the elder, wept at the generosity of his benefactor, and his young wife kissed the rough and wrinkled hands of Jean Pilliod. But Jean Pilliod was very old and his hair was so white that even Pierre Prevost, who was past sixty, looked young beside him.

The old fisherman and his pretty wife and little Pierre worked very hard until a cabin was built near a clump of willow trees close by the water. Then Jean Pilliod gave them

a reel, and two good nets, and lumber for a broad fishing-boat. But even after all this generosity, it went very hard with the little family.

Often during the day the pretty wife of the old fisherman would stand in the doorway of the cabin and look wistfully toward the distant city, wishing in her vain little heart for a palace and a park.

“If I could have forty brocaded gowns every morning to choose from,” she would say, “and could drive out in a mahogany brougham with a coachman in a green velvet coat and white breeches, I would look very charming.”

Then she would shift her apron so as to conceal the soiled places in her faded gingham, and return to her housework.

Pierre Prevost was a patient-looking old fisherman, and you would never have suspected that many curious dreams kept him company. He would often also look away toward the distant city, the steeples and tall buildings of which could just be discerned down the river, and in his heart he would say:—

“If only I could once catch a netful of

golden fish, with eyes of opal and diamond-studded gills, I would sit every morning, in a purple dressing-gown and morocco slippers, with nothing in the world to think of but how to pass a pleasant day."

He would sometimes put a wishbone or a buckeye into the net before casting it, and if the load was heavy when he began to pull it in, his hands would tremble and his eyes pop out like the eyes of a mullet head. For all his hoping, however, and in spite of the charms he used, there was never a golden fish for his catching.

But little Pierre was the most unfortunate of the three, for he possessed the most sensitive and tender heart. He seldom had any time for play, and when he had, there was no one to play with him. The children of the neighbouring villages laughed at his shabby clothes, for it was only a rough and bullying disposition that could pass muster with them in rags. So little Pierre wandered by himself when not helping his mother with the housework or his father with the fishing. He, too, had his dreams of the city, but they were gentle and timid dreams, for which he had no words. All that he ever said as he looked

toward the distant steeples was, "If only I might have her for a playfellow," and this singular wish he repeated over and over as a good little Catholic says his prayers.

Now little Pierre was thinking, every time he made this wish, of a little girl in a sky-blue silk dress and bonnet, who had waved a dainty white hand at him from the steamer once when it passed close to his father's flat fishing-boat. He had only stared at her stupidly at the time, but it was not from stupidity. At first he did not move, for astonishment, and then he could not, for despair, as the great monster with the splashing wheels bore the beautiful princess away. As the days passed, he only remembered her the better. Often, after that, the passengers of this pleasure steamer saw a very ragged boy looking eagerly up at them from a flat fishing-boat.

Old Pierre, too, found an interest in the passing steamer. He would smile and nod in the most friendly fashion to whomever might be looking over the side. The fact was, that old Pierre had for so long been intending to purchase the steamer and sit in the pilot-house with his purple dressing-gown

on, when he should catch a netful of golden fish, that he had grown to look upon it as already his, and the people in it as his guests.

Now, the pretty wife of old Pierre Prevost was so very pretty that whenever she went into the village the young men stood in long rows to watch her pass, and even the old men and women, too, turned to look at her; and she was so very young that all this admiration made her cheeks burn with pleasure, because she knew that she was pretty, and with shame because she had nothing but an old gingham dress to wear. She was, indeed, only a pretty, young, and foolish little wife of an old fisherman. And the fame of her beauty and her youth reached even farther than the villages. Now and then young men driving out from the city along the river road would stop opposite the island and point to the cabin by the willows. Sometimes a jovial party, which had partaken a little freely of Mother Peppercorn's wine, would pass by singing: —

“There's a princess in the cabin,
Frying fish for old Pierre;
Pretty princess, dressed in gingham,
What misfortune brought you there?”

On more than one occasion while the old fisherman was away casting his charmed nets for golden shoals, some of these bold fellows found their way across the island to the cabin; but those who came for mischief went away to remember in silence the dainty little woman in a gingham gown who had received them with the innocent welcome of a child and the grace of a real princess. But one day as she was standing in the doorway, looking wistfully away toward the city, she heard a musical voice by her side, and, turning, she saw such a handsome youth, so richly dressed, and with such a fascinating air, that her cheeks were covered with blushes, and her heart was filled with a strange mingling of delight and fear.

“I think you must have been wishing for something,” said the youth, with a merry smile. “I saw it in your eyes; but your eyes, I am afraid, speak only French, for I could not understand them.”

“I was wishing,” she answered, looking into the face of the youth with an irresistible frankness, “that I might have forty brocaded gowns every morning to choose from, and a mahogany brougham with a

coachman in a green velvet coat and white breeches." She perched her head to one side and looked at him as much as to say, "Would I not be very charming then?"

"Now that," replied the youth, more seriously, but smiling still, "is a strange wish for the wife of old Pierre Prevost, the fisherman."

"Yes, yes," she assented in confusion; "it is all very strange."

"Now tell me," said the youth, persistently, "do you love the old fisherman, or is it true, as I have heard, that you are a princess under a spell, and that Pierre Prevost is your ogre?"

Again her cheeks dimpled with laughter because the gentle dreamer, her old Pierre Prevost, had been thought an ogre.

"Why, I can hardly remember when he was not my husband." She tried to think. "No, I cannot remember—it was a long time ago, in France."

"But you," said the youth, "cannot be more than sixteen, and little Pierre is ten, at the least; now your good man is sixty or more, and you cannot remember when you married him! It is, indeed, very mys-

terious, and I more than half believe it is all the work of witchcraft."

While the wife of the old fisherman was still laughing at the youth's bewilderment, as a little girl might make merry at a tormented playfellow, old Jean Pilliod came suddenly between them. He turned his head with its heavy covering of white hair from side to side slowly, looking now at one and now at the other, and his bright little eyes sparkled like stars beneath his heavy white brow. Taking the youth away with him, he pointed to the rich fields of his island farm and said:—

"You have travelled over the world, my son, and have seen better land than this," but there was that in his eyes to contradict his own words. The youth replied, —

"My father, I have been in most countries and have seen many good fields and many beautiful women; I have talked with wise men, also; but with these three things this island of yours is blessed beyond all other places."

"The wheat grows well here, it is true, and now that we are at the door of my cellar, you shall judge of the wine for yourself."

The youth sighed.

The old man turned to him and said, —

“Richard, I have known you since you came into the world; and long before that time your father, who was a just man, tasted of the very juice you shall drink this day.” He took the youth gently by the arm and added: “And if I live I shall some day say as much to a son of yours. Come, when we are young every tree is full of sweet fruit; but as we grow older we learn to avoid that which is forbidden.”

They entered the cellar, and Jean Pilliod, pointing to the long rows of barrels and shelves of bottles covered with mould, said: —

“It is all good, honest wine. If you drink with me, I shall be satisfied.”

“Then I cannot drink,” said the youth, quickly. He looked into the eyes of the old man, and continued: “This is not the first time I have seen her. I have lived in the village there for a month, my father, only that I might see her as she came and went. And tell me, do you think that she will be always happy in a fish shanty, by the river-side, with the affection only of a foolish old

grandfather? She is not even now contented, but every day looks wistfully toward the city. She dreams of possessions that can never come to her as the wife of an old fisherman; and do you think it possible for Pierre Prevost to love her as I do?"

Even Jean Pilliod could find nothing to say to this, for he loved the youth, and he knew something of the dreams of the young wife, and more than this, for he had often laughed at the foolish ambitions of the old fisherman. But he shook his head sadly, locked the door of his wine cellar, and walked away from the youth in silence, for this was his duty.

That evening, as usual, while old Pierre was mending his nets and packing the day's fishing for the market, the boy and his child-mother sat near him by the river.

"Little Mother Madeleine," said the boy, "tell us a story about the fairies and a princess."

"I was just now thinking of one," answered Madeleine. Old Pierre nodded and smiled, and looked at his wife with an expression of childish delight. Just then the wind rustled

the leaves of the willows as a prelude, and Madeleine began:—

“A long time ago there was a very gentle ogre who lived by the sea, and the only sorrow that he knew was that, while in his heart he cherished only a desire to be good and kind, he was for some unaccountable reason an ogre. But an ogre he was; and accordingly, one day, he cast a spell about a beautiful princess and carried her off to his great stone castle by the sea.

“Now the ogre was so sorry for the princess that he wove his spell of dew from the cups of May blossoms, and for a long time the princess moved about him as one in a light and peaceful sleep. The things around her assumed magical shapes, and what would otherwise have been a very hard lot was almost a delight, for she neither felt nor thought, but dreamed. Sometimes she would realize where she was and wonder at it; but then another dream would come, and her doubts would vanish in a sigh.

“One day the ogre cast his nets into the sea as usual and sat on a stone near by until evening, singing:—

“ ‘Come, fishes, come, fishes, with long and sharp fins,
My pretty young mistress must have some new pins ;
She needs them to fasten her twenty pink bows
Upon her green teagown in two zigzag rows ;
I’ve baited my meshes with barley for you,
So come along quickly, whatever you do.’ ”

“ All day the ogre sat upon the rock singing, and at sunset he hauled in his net. From the weight he fancied he must have caught all the fishes of the sea, but when his haul was safe on shore, imagine his surprise to find but one, and that no larger than a perch. He was about to throw it into the water when he noticed that it was a very curious fish. Its eyes were human and of a beautiful brown; its fins were like little hands, and its scales — ”

“ Its scales,” interrupted the old man, who was listening in the most intense excitement, “ were of pure gold. Come, Madeleine, was it not a fish of gold ? ”

“ Yes,” she assented, with a merry nod, “ and its scales were of pure gold. Now, when the ogre saw this, he left his nets to take care of themselves and returned to the castle with so great speed that he puffed like a hurricane. When he entered the chamber

of the enchanted princess he inadvertently blew her out of the window, and after her went the fish of gold. The ogre rushed to the casement in a terrible fright, but, looking beneath, he saw the princess resting in the arms of a youth in golden armour, who was fanning her back to consciousness with the long yellow plume of his bonnet.

“‘Is she hurt?’ screamed the ogre.

“‘She is not,’ replied the knight, with a savage glance upward, ‘but she would have broken every bone in her sweet body if I had not caught her.’

“‘And who are you?’ asked the ogre, in astonishment.

“‘I am Richard —’”

Here Madeleine blushed and murmured in such confusion that old Pierre leaned forward eagerly and said, —

“What, what — I did not quite hear you, Madeleine.”

“‘I am Richard, the Knight of the Bonnet and Plume,’ he replied.

“‘Oh,’ said the ogre, who, though he had never heard of such a knight, was too polite to say so. He popped in from the window and hurried down the stairs to the garden;

but when he arrived the stranger had disappeared, and the enchanted princess was just coming to herself, seated on a bank of violets with the fish of gold beside her.

“‘How did I get here?’ she inquired, when her eyes were open.

“‘Oh, I just blew you down,’ said the ogre, anxious to make light of his awkwardness. ‘Did you enjoy it, my dear?’

“The princess looked at him in a way to make forty ogres tremble, and would undoubtedly have said something very sarcastic had she not suddenly noticed the gold fish by her side. Then every other thing was forgotten, and when the ogre told her it was to her he had brought it, she jumped up from the bed of violets and danced all around the garden. She put the fish in a golden punch-bowl filled with water and carried it to her own chamber. That night, as she was combing her beautiful hair, she could not help looking, now and then, into the punch-bowl, and each time that she looked the human brown eyes of the fish were upon her. If she moved from one side of the room to the other, the fish moved in the same direction round the little circle of the bowl, until, affected by

its manner, she went near it, and bending over it, said:—

“‘Oh, fish of gold, why do you follow me so constantly with your sorrowful eyes?’

“Whereupon the fish, with one swift movement of its tail, leaped from the bowl to the floor and disappeared. In its place stood a youth in golden armour, with a gay bonnet and plume of gold upon his head.

“‘It is I, sweet princess,’ he said, ‘the Knight of the Bonnet and Plume. I have taken this method of gaining an entrance to this castle, and if you love me, we will find a way to escape from the ogre who keeps you here.’

“At this moment the ogre entered, and was very much surprised to see the Knight of the Bonnet and Plume there. But when the princess had explained the situation to him, and had told him that she loved the knight, he said:—

“‘I am sure I hope you can find a way to escape, for I would like nothing better than your happiness. I would never have cast a spell over you at all if I had not had the misfortune to be an ogre. I don’t want to be an

ogre, and never would have been if I had had anything to do about it.'

"So saying, he sat down on the edge of the bed in the most dejected manner.

"'Let us all try and think of some way to escape,' said the princess.

"So she and the Knight of the Bonnet and Plume sat down by the side of the ogre to think.

"There they sat without moving for three years and three days, when the knight said, —

"'If we should walk out of that door and down the stairs to the garden, we could probably get out, if the gate is not locked.'

"'The gate is locked,' replied the ogre, 'with three locks; but in each lock there is a key, and if you turn the three keys the gate will swing open of its own accord and there will be nothing to hinder you.'

"'Let us try it,' cried the knight.

"'We will,' said the princess.

"'May I go with you?' pleaded the ogre, 'because I shall be lonesome here.'

"The knight and the princess consented, and all three walked away to the king's palace, where a great wedding took place amid

the rejoicing of the whole kingdom. The royal parents could not lavish honours enough upon the brave knight who had rescued their beautiful princess from the ogre and his great stone castle by the sea."

"That's a very good story, Madeleine," said the old man, nodding at her in emphatic approval. "But it was too bad to have the fish of gold nothing but a man, after all."

"He was a very handsome youth," sighed the young wife.

"I know, I know," he answered. "He must have looked very brave in his shining armour and bright bonnet; but there are not many gold fish in the sea."

Old Pierre, crossing his wrinkled brown hands, continued: "I have lived a long time; but though never a day passes when I forget them, or a night but that I look for them, I have never found a trace of the little people. This world has been a dull world since the fairies went away, and people must bear their own burdens. But," he added more cheerfully, "I shall catch a netful of gold fish one of these days, and then—"

"And then," interrupted Madeleine; but

neither the old fisherman nor his young wife finished their reflections aloud.

The next day, in the midst of a reverie, Madeleine looked up and saw Richard standing by the door. She uttered a cry of astonishment and delight, and dropped the bread she was carrying to the oven upside down on the floor.

“Never mind that,” said the youth, laughing, “but come with me. I have bought you a mahogany brougham with a coachman in a green velvet coat and white breeches. If you will come with me, dear princess, you shall have as many brocaded gowns as you wish, and whatever there is in the world, besides, to make you happy.”

He held his hand toward her, and his eyes were so full of entreaty that she could think of nothing to say or do. As she did not move, but stood smiling at him, her eyes bright with desire, he went in, and, taking her hand, led her to the door.

“See,” he said, pointing to the distant road on the river bank, “there is the mahogany brougham as you have desired and the coachman, too. Will you come, dear Madeleine?”

She looked toward the road for a moment,

then drew her hand away and shook her head with a sigh. But her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes shone brightly under their drooping lids.

“Madeleine,” he said, “you need not go away, but you will at least come and see them.”

Again she looked toward the road, and, thinking there could be no harm in just seeing them, consented. The youth and Madeleine left the cabin and walked together across the island. They did not follow the path, but found a way through the fields of tall grain until they came to the water's edge. Richard pushed his boat from its hiding place in the bushes and assisted Madeleine into it. All this while neither had spoken, but their hearts were full of a great delight because of each other's presence. When Madeleine was seated, Richard looked into her eyes and said: —

“I love you and shall always, and I know that you love me. So, whatever you do, even if I should never see you again, I shall think of you tenderly. But neither you nor I will be happy again unless we are together.”

Then he took the oars and rowed in silence.

When they reached the road her tears vanished and her eyes grew as big as blackberries, for there by her side was the most marvellous brougham in the world, and a coachman as gorgeous as a parrot, holding the reins to four dappled horses. The door stood open and she stepped in to see how it looked inside. Richard said, "Shall we drive a little way to see how it seems?" and she answered, "We might drive a little way, just to see how it seems."

Richard seated himself by her side; the gay-coated coachman gave a loud crack of his whip, and the four dappled horses started off with a bound. Never before had Madeleine known such delight. The seat of the coach was as soft as a summer cloud, and there was a yellow satin cushion filled with swansdown for her feet. She looked from the window and saw the world float past her, a constantly changing picture of forests and flowery fields. The enchantment was broken as she glanced at her gingham gown, and a sudden recollection of the cabin, of the old fisherman, her husband, and of little Pierre drove the colour from her face and the wild happiness from her eyes.

"We must go back," she faltered.

"Very well," Richard replied, "it shall be as you wish."

The four dappled horses were turned about in a moment, and a little later Madeleine, looking from the window of the brougham, saw the island beneath her.

He did not urge her to remain, but as he helped her to alight he pressed her hand and looked into her eyes in such a manner that no words were necessary. Madeleine patted the side of the brougham and looked in admiration at the gay costume of the coachman. She glanced gratefully at Richard and murmured an acknowledgment of his goodness.

"Of course," she added, "you know that I could not really go away with you, even if I would, and that I cannot say I would when it is impossible for me to do it."

"I see no good reason why you should not leave the old fisherman," replied Richard, "and come with me. He had no right to marry you as soon as you were born, and he should now take the consequences of his impudence."

"I wish —" She stood for a moment

with the unfinished sentence on her lips, and then in silence turned toward the path down the hillside to the boat.

Richard left her near the willows, saying, "I will not come again for a week, but every day your brougham will be waiting for you."

Madeleine watched his departure through a mist of tears.

"I do love him," she told herself, while trembling at the confession. "What a strange thing that I should be the wife of old Pierre. If he were only my father. Indeed, it is only as a father that I have thought of him. I did not know what love was. My kind old ogre, if you could but know how unhappy I am."

By nightfall she had recovered a little from her despair, and when she heard the sound of oars she hastened to the river, for it was a welcome sound in the midst of her loneliness. The old fisherman had brought her a string of glass beads and little Pierre an ancient Christmas card with a picture of two shining angels upon it.

Now, as it happened, Jean Pilliod had been a witness to Madeleine's adventure, and it was with a troubled heart that he

contemplated the possibilities of Richard's wooing.

"I will have a talk with my old friend," he said at the conclusion of his reflections; "for it is my opinion that a little wisdom is sometimes a good thing in the world."

That evening he stood at the open door of the cabin and said:—

"Pierre Prevost, I think there will be a strong wind to-night. If you can help me get the cattle to shelter, I will help you mend the nets after the next day's fishing."

The willows at that moment were caught by a passing gust, and seemed in their own way to join in the prophecy of the old man.

When they were some distance from the house Jean Pilliod said:—

"The cattle are already under shelter, but it is a serious matter I have to speak with you about. My old friend, little Pierre is your son by adoption, and Madeleine, his sister, is the daughter of a woman you loved; and when that woman died, deserted by her husband, she gave their two children to you, Pierre as a son and Madeleine as a wife, because she thought in this manner the evils of her own life would be kept from

her. You have treated her as a daughter, and until this time she has known no unhappiness. All this is true, is it not?"

The old fisherman gave a wondering assent.

"And you love her only as a daughter?"

"That is true, also," he answered. "She has been as my own child to me. But what serious matter is there in all this?" and he looked anxiously at his companion.

"Surely, my good Pierre Prevost, you know that when God made the heart of a maiden he fashioned it of love and placed the image of a youth therein. Since when has one ever been satisfied with the affection of a father?"

"Of what are you speaking?" exclaimed Pierre Prevost in astonishment. "It was yesterday that Madeleine laughed. She has been as merry as a chickadee for these ten years, when the days are fine. It is only bad weather that saddens her."

"That is true enough of these ten years past," returned Jean Pilliod. "But there will be many a fine day in the future when your sweet chickadee would rather weep than sing."

“Why,” cried old Pierre, in alarm, “what has happened?”

“You have heard the woodpecker sound his amorous summons on the trees in spring, and the call of the robin and the thrush; and you have seen the feathered maidens of their kind listen with drooping heads until some voice in the forest or field awakened them to love?”

“I have heard all this,” answered Pierre Prevost, impatiently. “But Madeleine is neither a woodpecker, a robin, nor a thrush.”

“And yet,” returned Jean Pilliod, gravely, “she has heard the voice of her lover, and do you think she can hear in silence and be happy again?”

“What do you say?” cried the old fisherman. “What lover has Madeleine that I know nothing of? Has some good-for-nothing in the village been here again?”

“Pierre Prevost,” said Jean Pilliod, angrily, “are you a fool? Do you think there are none but good-for-nothings in the world? And can you suppose that Madeleine would find music in the voice of a blue jay? Have not all the scamps in the country and gay fellows from the city been wooing her in

vain for just one look of love for a year? Richard Ingovy is a bold and noble youth. Madeleine could more easily prevent her heart from beating than from loving him. Come," he added more gently, "if yours is the affection of a father, my friend Pierre, this is a great blessing come upon you; for what father does not find his joy in the happiness of his children?"

Pierre Prevost was silent. Doubt, fear, and a feeling of loneliness oppressed him, for in the affection of the most gentle of fathers there is some selfishness. He remembered Madeleine's half-concealed melancholy, which he had scarcely noticed before. Jean Pilliod had left him, and he was standing alone near the willows. The wind, which had been rapidly rising during the conversation of the old men, tossed the long branches above him as if in a frenzy, and an ominous murmur came from the grain fields. Suddenly Pierre Prevost laughed. It was a soft and musical sound which the wind whirled away in an instant, but the merry light in his eyes remained. He had remembered the story of the kind ogre and the enchanted princess, and it had a new meaning for him

now. His hat blew off, and he chased it to the cabin door. When he entered he found Madeleine bravely at work in an almost hopeless effort to mend the tattered coat of little Pierre. The boy was sitting by the window listening to the wind. The old man looked closely at his wife, and she, lifting her eyes, smiled and nodded in recognition of his return.

The next day as Madeleine was alone in the cabin it was only natural that her lover should be constantly in her mind. In whatever direction she might attempt to go, her feet always led her to the doorsill, and look which way she would, it was impossible to prevent a glance toward the distant roadway.

As she could not see the brougham, she began to wonder if it really were there.

"Surely," she told herself, "there can be no harm in going just to see."

She put on a new apron, and her bonnet with white mull strings, and hurried through the fields to the other side of the island.

There was the boat hidden in the bushes with the oars in their places. As she could see no better there than at the cabin, she rowed across and ascended the path to the

road. Before her stood the mahogany brougham and the coachman in his green velvet coat and white breeches.

Poor Madeleine was distracted. She looked at the brougham with beating heart. There was no one near but the gay-coated coachman, and he looked straight over his horses' heads, immovable as a man of stone. She tiptoed to the open door and looked in. There was the yellow satin cushion of swans-down for her feet, and in the very place where she had been seated before was a bunch of white roses.

"O dear, O dear," said Madeleine, with a sob. She hurried back to the boat and through the fields to the cabin without so much as a glance behind.

In this manner the whole week passed. Every day came a stronger temptation to Madeleine, and every evening she sat with her old husband and little Pierre, telling stories by the river.

"It is a very easy matter," she would sometimes say to herself, "to make everything come right in a fairy tale," but her own troubles seemed to grow heavier, and she could see no way out of them.

“He will surely come to-day,” she said, when the week had passed, “and I shall see him again. Then he will go away forever, and I must try once more to find contentment here.”

But she knew very well how it would be. Although she desired to put on her prettiest dress that morning, she did not do it, because she had never worn it before except on holidays, and she was determined to be very stern with herself.

But when she saw him standing by the door, smiling as he had smiled when she first saw him, she forgot her good resolutions and, sitting in the chair nearest her, fell to weeping. Richard came to her side and said softly, —

“Would you be happier if I went away?”

“Oh, Richard,” she answered, “I can never be really happy again; but it must be as it is, for am I not already a wife?”

“No,” answered old Pierre from the doorway. Both Richard and Madeleine were very much startled, but the old fisherman was beaming upon them with such a merry face that they smiled in answer.

“You are a wife in name only, my sweet

Madeleine." Then he told them how she and little Pierre had been given to him long ago, and added, "so you see the ogre was really an ogre in spite of himself; and now that the prince has arrived, we will not sit on the edge of a bed for three years, but proceed at once to a wedding."

Whereupon he rushed into the cabin and caught Madeleine in his arms and kissed her for the first time in his life, and handing her to Richard, rushed out again.

So Madeleine and Richard were married and rode away after the wedding in the mahogany brougham. Though they pleaded with the old fisherman to go with them, he stoutly refused, and kept little Pierre with him.

A few days later when he went to look at his nets, he found them filled with gold fish. "At last I have caught them!" he cried in the wildest delight, and neither Richard nor Madeleine would have had him know how they came there, for the world.

Every evening old Pierre sat in his purple dressing gown and morocco slippers, — in the summer by his own cabin, where Jean Pilliod would often join him, and in the winter by

his fireside or the fireside of his friend. This was luxury enough, for like a true philosopher he preferred to dream of the most tempting extravagances and enjoy them forever, than to possess the reality for a moment. Living in this manner, he never had occasion to sigh for the days of his poverty, but continued to be both rich and happy. Is not the possessor of dreams the most fortunate of beings? No winds can rend the countless ships of his fleet, no thieves can steal, nor moths destroy his merchandise. His wealth increases more rapidly than a miser can compute. Neither time nor distance can retard his travel. No loom of earth can rival his exquisite fabrics, nor Nature herself equal the beauty of his landscape. His pleasures never become a burden, for there is no limit to their variety. It is only by exchanging a dream for an earthly trinket that we can know disappointment. Oh, blessed of the earth, touch not your dreams, for they are more easily broken than the cobweb that glistens in the morning, and the colour will vanish as from the wings of a butterfly at the touch of your hand. Oh, little Pierre, little Pierre, will you some day learn

to love your princess and to leave her free?
Or will you, too, make captives of the heavenly messengers?

* * * * *

As the last words of the story were spoken, Sister Melita drew a few tender chords from the harp, ceasing as the convent clock tolled another hour. Now followed the *De Profundis*, and Father Richter murmured: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. O Lord, hear my prayer." Polly, forgetting the archbishop, put her cheek against the hand of Father L'Amora and sighed. Edna dropped her head upon the shoulder of Sister Cordelia and listened to the fountain. Hilda sat with her hands clasped over her knee, gazing intently before her. Her lips moved once as she unconsciously whispered "Pierre." She was again hurrying with him across the island in the moonlight, again peering with him through the door of the hut upon the empty bed. Now she was in a boat on the river; but the figure in the prow was no longer a phantom, it was Pierre.

"My children," said the archbishop, "may your dreams by night and by day be inno-

cent and sweet." With this blessing he left them and returned with Father Richter to the house. On the way, he said :—

"We all have something of the ogre about us. We would imprison ourselves and those we love in the castles of our own conceits. If we examine these formidable, locked doors of ours with a generous eye, we will see the keys therein. I pray you, my dear brother, to throw open your doors."

CHAPTER XII

"FATHER L'AMORA," said Polly, when the girls and the two sisters were alone with him on the lawn, "what did you mean by asking Pierre if he would seek to make captive the heavenly messengers; if he would not learn to love his princess and leave her free? Don't you see that the princess is *not* free, and that she would rather be Pierre's captive than the ogre's, amiable as he may be? You must not forget the princess, you know."

Father L'Amora laughed.

"Do you think, my dear," he said, "that the teller of a story ever knows what he means? His is only the gift of speech. Those who listen are his interpreters."

"I will tell you, then, what you meant," said Edna. "What we love may become ours, perhaps, but we do not enjoy it in the — I mean, our enjoyment of it is not in possessing it, but in the love we feel."

"I am glad," said he, "that you find so

much wisdom in my story. What did you say, Hilda?"

She had spoken, but so low no one heard. Now she asked, hardly above a murmur, —

“Did you really know Pierre?”

“Yes, I knew him. Pierre and old Jean Pilliod really lived on the island. That is, these two were like my Jean and Pierre in their natures, not in their outward circumstances or relations. When I wrote the story I scarcely knew either of them, and did not know that the one was the grandchild of the other. I first met the boy in a way that awakened my fancy, and I wrote the story that night.”

“How did you meet him?” asked Hilda.

“I was walking toward the city from Maumee one day, ten years ago. As I came near the orphan asylum, about a mile from the village, I met a boy just leaving the gate. He was a handsome little lad, with dark hair and eyes, and he was crying. As soon as he saw me, he tried to conceal that fact in a whistle. I managed to make friends with him, and found that his name was Pierre and that he lived on the island. It seems that a little girl, a playmate of his, had been taken

to the asylum some time before. He had not seen her since, and had run away from school that day to find her. When he asked for her at the door, he was told she had gone away on the boat and would never come back. He told all this so simply, and revealed such a wistful, restless, fine little soul in the telling, that I could not forget it. I went to the asylum to make inquiries, and was referred to the register. She had been sent with some woman to Dakota. Of course that was the last of her, but I used to see the boy now and then. I noticed him very often when the boat came up, standing on a certain little knoll at the north edge of the island, and I fancied by the way he watched it that he was thinking of this girl he had lost; and, to such a boy as he, she would surely be a princess."

"Did you — did you see him often?" asked Hilda.

"Not at first. But one day I heard him mentioned as a bad boy — a terrible little runaway. He would not go to school, and had been twice picked up by the police of the city and sent home. There was some talk of putting him in a reform school. One

day I saw him on the dock at Perrysburg, waiting, as I thought, for a chance to slip on the boat unseen. I induced him to go with me, and we had a wonderful afternoon together in the church. I knew by my own memories how the vaulted ceiling, the coloured lights from the stained windows, and the music of the organ would appeal to him. I played for him, and he never moved all the time we were there. I went home with him and talked with his people. His mother did not understand him at all; his father was rather indifferent, but thought he should be made to go to school and begin to work. His grandfather, however, listened to me with tears in his eyes when I suggested that he should be allowed to stop school and come to me in the afternoons. I would teach him myself, and he might work with his father in the morning. This was finally agreed to. In this way we commenced a friendship that has been very dear to me."

"Well," said Hilda, trying to speak lightly, "and what happened next?"

"You don't expect two stories in one evening, do you?"

"Come, girls," said Sister Cordelia, "even

our guests must go to bed some time. If you would keep those pretty roses in your cheeks, you must sleep early and not late. You see that Hilda has already lost hers."

When Edna awoke the next morning the bed on her left was empty. Hilda was not there. "She has gone for an early bath," she thought, and curled up for another nap.

For an hour before dawn Hilda had walked the dark corridors. As soon as it began to grow light, she went into the chapel, passed slowly up the aisle, and stood for a long time before the confessional.

"I could not do it," she said, and turned away.

Now Hilda had dreamed that she was floating with Pierre in a boat. They were lying together on a bed of blossoms. The perfumes were strangely sweet. Pierre's hand lay lightly upon her heart as he slept. She awoke and found the hand was her own. At first this had seemed to her a beautiful dream; but as she lay smiling in a half doze, certain mysterious lines of the catechism and of the description of the seven deadly sins came now vividly before her. She seemed to hear a voice saying, "Let your dreams be inno-

cent and sweet," and in the voice there seemed to be the sternness of rebuke. Her dream had been sweet, but was it innocent? Did she know now what was meant by the entertaining of unpure thoughts? Oh, were her thoughts sinful, and was she entertaining them wilfully and with delight? She crept from her bed, hardly knowing what she did. Must she make this a matter of confession? She trembled at the thought of the austere voice of Father Richter.

When the convent doors were open at sunrise she walked out, and taking the Way of the Holy Angels, went slowly to the grotto.

Now, of all the people of the convent, the aged Monseignor Ambrose was the first to be up in the morning. It was his delight to awake with the earth; and every sunrise, for years, had found him waiting for it. This morning he was walking near the grotto, and saw Hilda enter. He had often talked with her and her friends, and he turned his steps to follow her, pleased at her early appearance. He stopped suddenly under the arch of the entrance and turned to go. She was kneeling at the shrine, weeping.

"I beg your pardon, my dear," he said as she looked up, startled.

On an impulse Hilda called to him.

"Oh, Monseignor Ambrose, will you help me?"

The old man went to her at once and took her hand.

"What is it, my child?"

"May I confess to you?"

"Of course you may. But I will tell you at once that you have not sinned. Here, sit by me on this bench and convince me. That is right," he said as she smiled. "Do you hear that thrush over there? He, too, is at his devotions. That is the way such as you and he should confess."

"But perhaps," she faltered, "I have really sinned."

He listened with closed eyes as she almost whispered her dream.

"My dear," he said, "that was a very sweet song. Now we will listen to the thrush again, for he has not finished his."

After a while they came away, and he said as they parted:—

"Love all who will let you, and you may find a true mate. Conform to the *laws* of

the church in your outward life and conduct, but let your soul hearken only to its *spirit*. That is to say, love, marry, and remain virtuous. Go to confession and to mass. Look for the smiling, tender face of Truth in the chapel, at the shrine, in the gardens, and in the fields. Believe in the innocence of your own soul, and as you do all these things you need have no fear of what happiness you dream or feel."

It was with a quickly beating heart that Hilda saw Father L'Amora walking in the grounds again that afternoon. He was on his way to the old sisters, but Hilda stopped him.

"May I ask you now what happened next? What became of Pierre?"

The priest smiled kindly and said,—

"Since you take so great an interest in him, I will show you his picture."

He took out his watch and snapped back the cover, revealing a miniature painting beautifully done. It was the head of a youth of twenty.

"How beautiful!" she murmured; "how sad!"

"Yes; it is difficult for a boy like him to

find what he seeks in the world. He goes in search of a princess and is returned by the police. He asks the way to a city of palaces and is directed to the reform school. But, my dear, we need not be so sorrowful about it, for all this teaches him in time that the world is in need of him. He must himself bring into it what he desires. I passed a few days with him not long ago, and painted this miniature."

"May I look at it again?"

He wondered at the deep colour of her cheeks, at her long and tender gaze, at the unconscious sigh, as closing the watch, she returned it to him. But beautiful girls and women were always, in his eyes, mysterious and holy beings, to be wondered at and loved, but never questioned seriously.

Father L'Amora walked on to the old sisters, and Hilda stood for a long time where he left her, her eyes bent on the ground. Then a smile, half tender and half mischievous, came stealing to her lips. It was her first thought of love as a maiden.

* * * * *

Mr. Alexander, now in his seventieth year, was more regular in his attention to business

than ever in his life. It became a point of honour with him to arrive at his office at the stroke of nine every morning, to stand about on 'Change until the last deal was closed, and to sit at his desk until the accounts of the day were settled. Ten years ago he would have come and gone when he pleased, and, if the fancy prompted, have remained away for a day or a week. Now, he was afraid such lapses might be attributed to his increasing age. He would show the world that he was as young as the best of them. He examined the styles with his tailor as gravely as before, and every day he wore a fresh carnation in his button-hole.

In the afternoon he would drive through the parks or stroll out to Mr. Mott's. He dined every evening with Primrose and her father, read the day's letter from Hilda, for the old custom had not been dropped, sat for an hour musing in his chair, and strolled back to his club. Primrose had urged him in vain to come with them to live.

"No," he would say, "an old bachelor is a great nuisance. Clubs and club servants are made for just such. They can stand the wear."

He would frequently challenge his friend Mott to a ten-mile walk.

"Come," the other would reply, "make it twenty."

They would start bravely forth, calling to Primrose not to forget the sort of appetites that belong to boys. "Primrose, remember the hot biscuit!" and "Primrose, remember the peas!" These two old friends had arrived at that stage where they could call each other's most cherished theories "stuff and nonsense," without creating an estrangement.

Mr. Mott, though he thought less about it, was really the sturdier of the two. His mind was as alert, his eye as clear, his innocence as appalling as that of a child of six. His garden was the world to him, and he wished that it might be his eternity as well. He had selected the place for his bed under a mulberry tree.

"When the frost hits me," he said to Primrose, "put the old bulb there."

Then he seemed to think no more about it.

He was now soon to conclude the most interesting of all his experiments. The summer before, as he and Mr. Alexander were looking at the flower-beds together, and the

world of bees and insects hovering over them, Mr. Alexander had said, —

“Where do all these bees come from?”

“I have often wondered. If they had not found me out, I should have been obliged to keep a hive.”

“Why so?”

“Oh, many of these flowers would not do well without them.”

“Stuff and nonsense!”

“You don’t believe me? Well, I tell you it’s so. These bees and insects have been my real gardeners. I have seen that more and more.”

“You are not serious, Christopher?”

“More than that,” his voice began to rise in his eagerness, for he had never before given expression to this idea, and it became exciting to think of as he contended for it, “more than that, I believe there are many flowers that owe their propagation entirely to the bees.”

“Christopher,” said the other, solemnly, “you need a walk.”

“I’ll walk you,” said the other. “Take me up to the island where that Pogonia is. I’ll get me a few seeds from it.”

“Have you remembered that for ten years?”

“Has it been ten years?”

“No, but it has been nine. It was nine years ago that I brought Hilda here.”

During all the long walk up the river Mr. Alexander was thinking of her.

“I tell you,” he said aloud, “that was a good experiment.”

“Which one do you mean?”

“Hilda.”

“I will show you by your own plant, Minot, that what I say is so.”

“I have proved,” continued the other, “that a girl can get along without boys.”

“I must have a plant, though, that buds and blossoms entirely protected from the bees. I would not even risk a bud. I will gather the seeds and sow them and divide the plants. Some of them I will grow in the garden and some in my experiment house. Then you will see.”

So they had journeyed, each thinking of his own experiments. The winter and spring had passed, and the Pogonias were about to bloom. Mr. Mott had often called his friend's attention to those imprisoned in the experiment house, assuring him over and over that

no bee should visit them and that in consequence, although they would blossom as gayly as their sisters of the garden, they would remain sterile.

“And the same thing will probably happen with this lady-slipper, and perhaps with this petunia I have grown here. These flowers must all have their bees or they would vanish.”

One day he made a drawing of a *Pogonia* blossom for his friend, and showed him the long protruding petal which it extended for its important visitor.

“The beauty of these blossoms seems almost pathetic to me at times,” said he; “for if they fail to allure a lover, they will have bloomed in vain. I am constantly discovering some new mission of beauty. I wish I could comprehend its full significance.”

He pointed out on his drawing the path the bee takes into the blossom, and how, just before reaching the pocket of honey, he rubs against the pistil and, uncapping it, allows the pollen to escape and fall upon his head and back.

“This pollen he must carry with him to the next blossom and give it to the waiting

stamen. So the union is made from which comes new life and beauty."

Mr. Alexander would listen, only partially comprehending, pleased with his old friend's interests and quite willing, on the whole, to accept his theories and beliefs.

As the time drew near for Hilda's return, he would stand near his old friend without hearing him. He would look at Primrose without seeing her. He would move about on 'Change, his hands behind his back, unconscious of where he was. He had taken no long walks this spring. If he started out with Mr. Mott, he made the beauty of some near-by spot the excuse to go no farther. He dozed in his office chair, in his rocker on the porch. Primrose now and then found him in the summer-house asleep. He did not go to the convent to bring Hilda.

"It is not necessary now," he said, "and I am needed here;" but in his own heart he grieved, for he wanted to go and knew that he dared not. He would sometimes shake his head and admit to himself that life was almost over, but in the presence of others he would sit very straight, even when

he dozed. The moment his head drooped, he would wake with a start and look about him. Primrose, noticing this, generally sat with her back to him so that he could renew his nap. She did not leave him much to himself, for she felt that he did not like to be alone.

All this she had written to Hilda, so when she came she was prepared for these changes.

“Uncle Minot,” cried the girl, with a rush of tenderness, as he met her at the train, “Uncle Minot, I am home at last. Did you miss me this long extra week very much? I will never, never leave you again.”

She could not say enough. Often since the memory of the asylum had been recalled to her she had seen the tall, strange woman from Dakota before her, and had escaped from the terror she had then felt, over and over. Every day some new memory of her Uncle Minot, of Primrose, her Uncle Christopher, and the garden had come to her.

Mr. Alexander tried for a moment to receive her with a stately affection, the sort of courteous tenderness he thought due to a beautiful woman; but before he knew it his arms were around her, and he was say-

ing, in a husky voice, "My little Hilda, my own little one!"

He leaned heavily on her shoulder as they went to the carriage. He no longer attempted to conceal his age from that moment, but openly betrayed his feebleness and dependence on her. He did not, however, forget any possible attention he might pay. He never took her driving without sending her a new parasol or gloves or a bunch of long-stemmed roses to carry. Every afternoon when he came to the garden he bent over her hand and kissed it. He would bring her new books and listen to her read. They would sit with Primrose and Mr. Mott in the evening, and the longest silences were their most intimate communions.

One day Mr. Alexander said: —

"I am growing stronger again every day. Perhaps by August I could take you to Europe. Would you and Primrose like to go?"

Hilda hailed this suggestion with delight. Primrose saw her pleasure and sighed.

"Oh, Uncle Minot," said Hilda, "Edna and Polly want to go this summer, too. I will

write to them, and perhaps they can go when we do."

Mr. Alexander brightened with the pleasure it always gave him to delight her.

"Write to them at once," he said, "and invite them to go with us as your guests."

"You mean yours, dear uncle. How happy I shall be."

"No, Hilda," he replied, "nothing is mine. All that I had is yours."

Hilda, of course, comprehended nothing in this statement but the love that it revealed. His voice and manner touched her deeply, and the prospect of giving her friends such a pleasure added to her emotion. She went to him and gave him a kiss, and it was worth more to him than all the wealth he had given her.

But Mr. Alexander had more motives than one in this trip to Europe. He had noticed how every one looked at Hilda as she drove with him. Beautiful she was, and she would certainly be noticed wherever he might take her. But here, in his own home, where every one knew him, there was an added cause for wonder and curiosity. Men might stare, perhaps, in Paris or London or Berlin,

but they could not ask him who she was nor seek to make him introduce them by riding by his carriage in the park, and seeking adroitly to include her in their conversation with him.

Since Hilda had appeared in her maturity, and the fame of her beauty and inheritance had crept abroad, he had been at first astonished and then annoyed by the multitude of his friends. Women whom he had once known and forgotten wrote him invitations to their receptions and lawn parties, their yachting trips and coach rides, always closing with a gracious request that he bring his niece with him. And the sons of these women tipped their hats to him with obtrusive politeness. They stopped him on the streets and asked his advice concerning investments. Mr. Nathan met him one day as he was walking with Hilda, and said bluntly:—

“Is this your niece, Mr. Alexander? We were sorry not to see you at our little affair last evening. My boy, Willie, wants to meet her. You know Willie? He is with the Second National. My only son, you know.”

All these things worried and even fright-

ened him. He began now to feel something of the terror of the city that had once been Mr. Mott's. It seemed to have its thousand eyes on Hilda, and a thousand greedy hands were reaching for her. He would take her away if the trip killed him.

Now, why did Primrose sigh? Ah, that was her secret,—a secret she had kept for almost a year.

"Primrose," said Hilda, when they were alone, "you don't seem pleased at the prospect."

"Don't I? Well, now, you know I could not go. What would your Uncle Christopher do? He would cook himself a mess of tulip bulbs some day in place of onions, or, worse yet, he would forget to eat at all."

"Oh, Primrose, can't you go?"

"But never mind, Hilda. It will be a fine thing for you to go. You will write to me, and I shall really be there, too. Have I not been through ten years of school with you? I would rather see Europe through your eyes than my own. I thought—" she hesitated a moment, and then said carefully, "I had anticipated something else; but that will wait, perhaps, till you come back."

“What was it, Primrose?”

“Oh, just nothing but dreams. Just one of the old foolish dreams, I guess.”

“They were not foolish. Dear, good Primrose, why do you talk so? You have been so queer since I came home. I don’t seem to know you any more.”

“Have I?” said Primrose, anxiously. “Then I won’t be. Do you remember how we got ready for the convent? What a sewing and a shopping we had? Well, that was nothing to what we must do now. You will take three great trunks to Europe, and we will begin at once to fill them.”

That night Primrose looked from her own room toward a window across the garden. The shutters were closed, and what she saw there to cause her to look so long, and to sigh so often, it would be difficult to guess. Her sleep was troubled, too. She kept repeating in her dreams, “Twelve pairs of stockings and two little shoes.”

But Hilda did not go to Europe. In the midst of all the enchanting preparations the plan was ended. She had spent the day with Primrose, sewing. She had gone for a walk in the garden at twilight alone. When she

returned, she sat like one in a stupor. Mr. Alexander spoke to her without noticing the change, but she did not hear him. When he spoke again, she looked up, and without answering him went to him, and, sitting by him on the floor, said gravely:—

“I don’t want to go to Europe any more. Dear Uncle Minot, please let me stay.”

In spite of his fears and projects this pleased him. To have her contented with so little when she might have so much, to have her happy just with him, her Uncle Christopher, and Primrose, seemed more than he had hoped for.

Primrose went up to her room and looked across to the window. The blinds were open. The sunlight was still upon it, the shadow of the opposite buildings was just beneath.

“Oh,” said Primrose, trembling with a great happiness, “she has seen Pierre. She has seen Pierre, and she knew him.”

When she went below she found Hilda reading to her Uncle Minot. She went almost shyly to her and kissed her hair.

“You look so happy,” said she, “I could not help it. And I am happy, too, for I did not want you to go.”

That night Hilda was the wakeful one. Primrose, when she went to her room, saw a little red light in Pierre's window. She placed one like it near her own, and, sitting by it, looked into the enclosure.

For almost a year Primrose had known for whom the rose-bush had been named. On a day of the last autumn, just after Hilda had returned to the convent, she was sitting in her enclosure by the fountain under Hilda's own maple, for the sun was hot. This tree had been nine years planted, and threw a comfortable shade. All that grew in this enclosure seemed to know why they were there, and to take a pride in the paradise they formed. Plants may not understand the language of those who talk to them and caress them, but they as surely feel the presence of those who love them as do we, and they respond to it in their own way, even more freely. Just as an old lady's sitting room comes in time to absorb her personality and to breathe it, so this enclosure, in its green carpet, its green hedge, its thrifty trees, its flowering shrubs, its cosey summer-house hidden with vines, its fountain and brook, whispered and bloomed and murmured of

its mistress who was here, and of its absent one. Nothing here could forget Hilda, for Primrose, who was the enclosure's soul, thought constantly of her.

As she sat there, then, on this autumn day, she seemed, as she was, the loved mistress of a knowing garden, contented and at home.

Presently, she heard some one say, "Would you mind if I jumped down there?"

She looked up and saw a youth of some twenty years watching her from a small balcony about fifty feet away. The blinds back of this balcony had never before been open, and she had long ceased to think of the window and that she might sometime have a neighbour.

The youth for a moment seemed like an apparition. As she looked at him, he said:—

"Don't refuse me. I am tired and hot, and you look so cool and comfortable."

Primrose smiled, for there was something in his handsome, wistful face and slender figure that pleaded with her more appealingly than anything he could have said.

"Can you do it?" she asked, dropping her book in her lap.

He laughed, and climbing over the rail of the balcony, dropped lightly to the ground.

"I learned to get out of a window when I was a boy," he said. "I had to."

"Do you live there?" asked Primrose, and a touch of the surprise, not unmixed with dismay, she could not help feeling, sounded in her voice.

"It's my studio. My little prison. I had to have one somewhere, I suppose. I selected this one because of your garden. Do you mind?"

She did not answer him then, but she suspected in her heart that she did not. When, a few days later, she knew his name and where he came from, and that he must have been a playmate of Hilda's, she no longer suspected—she was sure. He was the rose-bush Pierre: the dream-boy of her Hilda.

She tried to question him about the island, but he frowned and became restless when it was mentioned. She wanted him to speak of Hilda, but he did not. It required but a thought backward to deepen the shadow of his dark eyes, and bring there a look of fear and resentment. When he could speak to her of the books they read, of Father

L'Amora, whom he loved, or of the things he would some day see and paint, his face became passionate and eager. He was happy more often to stretch out on the grass and be silent.

It soon became evident to Primrose that she must say nothing to him of Hilda, nor to Hilda of him. Mr. Alexander must not notice his frequent visits. Here was a romance which her hungry heart craved, but must not ask for. If Hilda still remembered him, she might meet him, perhaps; but it must not be her doing. She never, for a moment, thought they could meet and not love each other. She would keep her secret and wait and hope.

"Pierre," she said one day, "could you think I was whimsical or absurd?"

"You, Primrose? If I told you what I think of you, you would call me very bold."

Primrose laughed and blushed.

"You are like the lover I have always wanted," she said, "and I shall not tell you, either, that you have come too late. There is a fairy in this garden, Pierre, who can do everything. Some day, perhaps, I shall come to you young and beautiful, and then — and

then — you must really love me. Now don't speak, for I mean it. You will see. But, now listen. You must not come here any more."

"I must not? Why?"

"Perhaps you will know that, too, sometime. You must believe me, Pierre, and do just what I say. Sometimes, in the evening, you may come. I have thought of a way to arrange it. At night this enclosure is yours as much as you wish it. If you want me, put a little chamber lamp with a red globe at your window; and if I see it and cannot come, I will put one in mine."

Pierre was looking at her with wide eyes. She smiled and said: —

"It is all very mysterious, I know, but I cannot help it. You have seen Mr. Alexander? Well, he must not notice you here, that is all."

During the winter and spring, Primrose kept Pierre strictly to this arrangement. Sometimes, when she met him in the evening, she would remind him of the fairy and the miracle she might perform, and so seriously that Pierre, fanciful as he was, began almost to expect it. He was inclined, in his

sober moments, however, to suspect that Mr. Alexander was the lover of Primrose, and, as absurd as it may seem, this thought brought him a pang of curious jealousy.

All this mystery was increased when, in June, Primrose sent him away.

“You must go somewhere for a month. Please, Pierre, don’t look so distressed. If you wish to make me happy, go away, but come back in a month. Perhaps,” she added, smiling, and yet seriously enough, “while you are gone the fairy will appear.”

So Pierre went away. When he returned, he went to his window and looked into the enclosure. He saw no one, and unpacked his easel and put his unfinished picture upon it. He stood for some time; then, with a motion of impatience, took it and broke the canvas on his knee.

“I will never do it,” he said, “never. It will never satisfy me without the sound of the bells, and I cannot get that.”

He returned to the window and looked out. The garden seemed very alluring and tender in the twilight. Suddenly a young girl came slowly through the opening in the hedge and walked through the enclosure.

He watched her just for her beauty, wondering who she was. Then she looked up and stopped and gazed at him. He seemed to see both wonder and recognition in her eyes. He thought, too, that she murmured his name. He stepped to the balcony; a feeling almost of fear held him there. In a moment, she turned and walked quickly from the enclosure.

“Good heavens!” he said, “am I dreaming?” He thought of the fairy and laughed. But both the beauty of the girl and her strange conduct had bewitched him so that even such a miracle did not seem so absurd. He put his red light near the window and waited. It grew late, but no one came. At nine o'clock, he saw an answering light at the window opposite.

“She cannot come,” he said. He wondered if there had been a wedding in his absence: if Primrose had been married. He could not believe this.

As he stood in his balcony, the scene beneath him did not tend to solve the mystery it held, for even the coldest eye cannot see reason so well by moonlight, and more things than facts might well grow in such a garden.

Pierre's eye was never cold. It had seen strange things even by day, and the world had not yet convinced him that the impossible is not all that is real.

CHAPTER XIII

IF ever there was a youth of twenty who, through April, May, and June, was not in love, I am happy to have missed him.

Pierre, already in love, beheld in this twilight apparition the outward form and substance of his mistress—the embodiment of his age, his nature, and the season.

As the moon rose and filled the garden with ghostly shadows, his imagination kept running to his heart with tales, and his fancy whispered of mysterious delights.

There was scarcely a sound now in the garden. Only the low voice of the fountain and the fitful rustling of leaves could be heard. The two red lights were out. The balcony was now in darkness, for the moon had passed over it, and the shadow of the building was creeping across the enclosure. The light still flooded the portion nearest the cottage and now into this came Hilda. She passed through the opening of the hedge

and stopped a moment to look and listen. Unconscious of the two watchers at their windows, she moved slowly through the moonlight to the little bench under her maple near the fountain.

In the soul of a boy like Pierre, Love builds a shrine. All that is loveliest to him, whether mountains or a meadow, a valley or a garden, a woodland or a field, has formed his holy land. If there has been little of affection in his life, this shrine is the more beautiful and sacred; for, hidden in some secret bower, it is for him a promise of all that he has missed. Here, too, grow the vines he has gathered by a look in his pilgrimages; here do the birds that have vanished return to make their eternal abode with him. It is a place of bloom and perfume and foliage, of silence and melody, of countless lights and shadows.

Pierre saw Hilda enter the enclosure and hesitate, as if the sound of a falling leaf might frighten her away. He almost ceased to breathe, and wondered fearfully if the shadow on his balcony would conceal him. He saw her move across the lawn and take her seat under the maple. He watched her

as one who, visiting his sacred bower by chance, finds that the shrine is no longer empty, that his divinity has come. He did not desire to approach, but remained in a silent ecstasy, a mingling of reverent devotion and expectant delight, looking, hoping, fearing to move lest she should vanish as mysteriously as she came.

The light falling through the tree played upon her white dress, her face, and hair as the leaves moved. She could not have told why sometimes her head drooped and her eyes closed, what brought the smile to her lips, nor why it was followed by a sigh. She did not know that she was again sitting in a place of Pierre's building, nor that he was watching her. And yet she must unconsciously have felt his presence, and heard the sounds, and caught the perfumes of his bower. Sometimes her memory, groping among shadows, sought to bring back the island and the child Pierre. She found herself, at the end of every revery, gazing upon the face of the miniature. Perhaps it was because she had seen in the eyes of this youth the same spirit that she had followed in the boy, that she now, unquestioningly,

accepted him as the embodiment of her dreams. She was not so conscious of the fact that she had seen him at the window overlooking the garden as of the impression the miniature had made. She had looked long and closely upon the portrait; her glimpse of his face at the window had been fleeting. She was not sure now that she had really seen Pierre. It was of him she was thinking, and not of his nearness. She was again feeling the stress of his desires, listening for the far-off voices that were calling him. It was as if she again stood behind him in the newer fields of his dreamland, pleading with the birds to come to him, hoping, with a deeper passion than before, that they would gain what he was seeking. For the face of the miniature was both strong and wistful.

Pierre watched from his balcony until he could no longer see her, for, with the passing of the moon, the shadows deepened under the tree. But he did not move. He knew that she was still there, and the darkness had a new tenderness and beauty for him. When he saw her faintly, by starlight, pass again over the lawn and through the

opening of the hedge, he took a flute from a table just inside, and, putting it to his lips, sent its low notes into the garden. He did not dare call this the message of his heart to her, but, since this it was, it came to her as such. She stood near the cottage listening, and realized again, with a fluttering of her heart and a strange trembling of her limbs, that he was there, so near that she might speak with him. This thought put her dreams to flight. She went to her room and, standing a moment before her mirror, blushed at her own blushes, and smiled half in shame and half in wondering pleasure into her own glowing eyes.

To those who have forgotten their youth and their first love, it may seem strange that for nearly a month Pierre was contented with an occasional glimpse of Hilda in the garden with Primrose during the day, or with watching her when she came there alone at night. Had he questioned Primrose, she would not have known what to tell him. This was too much her own romance. Had he spoken to her of his love, she would have blushed and trembled as if listening to a confession of passion for herself. She

would have bared her own breast to the world rather than have revealed to him whatever of Hilda's heart she might know. During the day they were in the garden together, reading, sewing, talking, dreaming, and attending to whatever needed their care. Sometimes Pierre stood by his window watching them. Both Primrose and Hilda knew when he was there, but they did not speak of him. Had Primrose not seen him, she would have known when he appeared by Hilda's covert glances, her heightened colour, her too evident effort to appear unconscious. Pierre also began to see that she knew when he was watching her, and he became more eager and yet more fearful.

At night Primrose remained within. When Mr. Alexander had gone, Hilda would enter the enclosure alone. As the weeks passed Pierre gained sufficient courage, watching her from his shaded balcony, to serenade her with his flute. He ventured this the first time, fearing that he might offend and frighten her away. He was intoxicated with happiness when, as he played, she remained motionless on her seat by the fountain. She did not seem to hear him, it is true, but he

could feel her near him ; he could watch the little white being that had somehow drawn to herself all the mystery and beauty of the night, and pour out to her, through the tenderest tones of his instrument, all that he felt so passionately, but could have found no words of his own to express.

As the glorious June nights passed, these serenades became more intimate and tender. Hilda was becoming for him not only the saint of his shrine, a priestess of beauty, but a sweet human being as well, with lips and eyes that might perhaps make answer to his confessions. He noticed now how white was her throat, how the colour came and faded in her cheeks, how her hair curled away from her forehead and about her little pink ears. As he realized that she was really listening to him, he began to speak to her of herself in what he played, to plead with and even to caress her.

All the garden seemed to find a pleasure in these sounds. A bird would move in its nest, chirping to its mate with something of the old April sentiment. Sympathetic murmurs passed from bush to bush, from tree to tree, and the wind, moving over the flowers,

was made the post for countless tender missives.

Christopher Mott, standing in his garden on these nights, looked sometimes toward Primrose at her window, at Hilda by the fountain, at Pierre on his balcony. He moved along his gravel paths, listening to the melody. He paused now and then under a tree or near a bush, smiling at the sudden stirring of their leaves, or, intercepting one of the missives of the flowers, he would say, "Yes, my children, it is true — the voice of love comes very sweetly through a flute."

In fact, the one voice that had long been lacking was at last sounding in the garden.

Mr. Alexander, from whose kindly nature this beauty had sprung, was the only one unconscious of it all. The Eden itself was visible to him, but he knew nothing of that which had brought to it the fulfilment of its destiny, without which it must have remained lost even to those who dwelt within it. He who should have been the lord of the harvest was now unconsciously threatening it with a long delay. When he entered the garden he brought with him a blighting shadow.

Pierre had learned that Hilda was his niece

and that this was the secret of his banishment. Primrose became more and more troubled by thoughts of him as she watched the unfolding of her romance. Hilda was oppressed by a singular misgiving as she became conscious that the coming of her Uncle Minot was no longer a delight to her. She did not admit even to herself any reason for this. She was apprehensive of something unknown when the time approached for his coming. She was restless if he brought her into the enclosure, and preferred to read to him on the porch. Her heart reproached her for these feelings, and she sought to silence it by increased attentions to him. But even as she read to him or walked by his side, as she smiled or caressed his hand, she knew that she was waiting only for him to go.

One day, as they were sitting on the porch, Mr. Alexander felt the chill of the shadow.

“My dear,” he said, “if you will excuse me, I will go for a while into the sunlight.”

He walked slowly down the path and stopped by the glass experiment house. The heat within tempted him. It would be good for his old bones. He saw Mr. Mott working over a heap of compost and called to him,

"Christopher, I am going in here for a sunning."

"Good," said Mr. Mott. "I will join you presently. Be careful to close the door after you, for one of the Pogonias is in bloom."

Mr. Alexander smiled and, going inside, sank into a seat with a sigh of pleasure. He was in the very centre of the flower garden and all about him were beds aflame. Here was a little field of deep blue larkspur surrounded by patches of purple asters, golden coreopsis, crimson poppies, and richly variegated petunias. There were beds of four o'clocks and sweet williams, marigolds and heliotrope, phlox and mignonette. They tossed their showy heads in the wind above, and among them moved bees and butterflies and a countless multitude of insects. The sound that came to him was like that of a distant carnival.

"It is strange," he thought, "very strange. Some of these bees must have travelled miles to reach here. They cannot be kept away, it seems."

He smiled at the memory of his friend's theories. In the midst of a pleasant fancy, his head drooped. The hum and buzz outside grew fainter and then more distinct. He

seemed to catch the sound of laughter, of happy murmurings, of smothered exclamations, and protests of delight. Then suddenly he heard distinctly, close by his side, a sighing and moaning, a tiny voice murmuring in complaint. He was not surprised to discover that it came from the Pogonia. The delicate pink blossom was pressed against the glass, and on the other side was a bee striving desperately to reach it. The sound of his body and wings beating against the glass was pitiful to hear.

“Oh, oh,” moaned the Pogonia, “why am I here? Oh, why am I here?”

It was indeed a cruel plight for such a bloom. Better to have kept her in a cellar, to have hidden her forever from the light than to have imprisoned her here, in the midst of her gay sisters, able to see them in their happy beauty, to hear the sound of their laughter, longing for and yet deprived of the lover even now beating his wings against her cage.

The thought of this brought a feeling of wrath to Mr. Alexander.

“Never mind, little one,” he said, “I will open the door. Your lover shall come in.”

His voice awoke him. He saw Mr. Mott approaching, and sat up very straight. Then he laughed at his own confusion, and when his friend entered, he said:—

“Come, my old foggy, your theories have got into my dreams. I have been just now listening to the complaint of your captive. Do you know what it wants?”

“I know,” said Mr. Mott, shaking his head. “These experiments are cruel. Shall I open the door? Look into this blossom, Minot. You see there are no seeds forming. Is it not pitiful—so much beauty gone to waste?”

“It is wonderful if it is really true.”

“Tell me that you are convinced, and I will take this poor plant to the garden.”

“Oh, I will believe you,” said Mr. Alexander, smiling at the seriousness of his friend. It was with a beaming face that Mr. Mott took the pots of Pogonias, lady slippers, and petunias and set them in the midst of the other blossoms. As he stood watching them for a moment with Mr. Alexander, he said,—

“Minot, have you ever thought of what you and Primrose would have done these ten years without Hilda?”

“We should have been very lonely.”

“More than that, you would have been almost useless — like my Pogonia bloom, in fact, without any seeds.”

“To hear you talk, one might think men and women grew in pots.”

“They are much the same. You will see.”

He looked up with a curious twinkle in his eyes as he added:—

“There are all kinds of bees in this garden. You will see.”

Mr. Alexander was puzzled. On more than one occasion lately Mr. Mott had spoken in riddles, and there was, now and then, this same glint of a secret in his eyes.

A few days later as they were again alone, Mr. Mott laughed absently to himself.

“What are you chuckling over?” asked Mr. Alexander, a little testily.

“Oh, not much. I was thinking of your dream. Do you ever doze when you sit with Hilda?”

The other turned away abruptly. He could not understand this.

“Don’t be angry,” said Mr. Mott, gravely. “Have you noticed no change in her? It might be a good thing for you to know what her thoughts are.”

“What do you mean? What thoughts can she have? Don’t you think she is happy?”

“How do I know? I can see, though, that she is a little paler and thinner than before.”

“Where is she?” asked Mr. Alexander, looking anxiously over the garden. He was more disturbed than he cared to admit. He walked slowly toward the house, but in reality his heart was filled with alarm.

He stood on the porch and called to her. When she appeared, he forgot everything but his anxiety, and peered closely into her face.

“Hilda,” he asked, “are you happy?”

Confused by the earnestness of his gaze and the abrupt question, she dropped her eyes and remained silent. She could not answer him at once. She felt suddenly that she was not altogether happy, that she had been carrying some trouble in her heart unknown even to herself. She knew that tears were filling her eyes and was ashamed of them.

“What is the trouble?” asked Mr. Alexander, now seriously distressed. “Why have you not told me, if you were unhappy? What more can I do?”

“Oh,” said Hilda, “you must not be anx-

ious. Don't — don't look so, uncle. It is nothing at all. I am happy, indeed I am. I don't know what was the matter with me. You took me by surprise, I guess — that was it."

She patted his cheek and kissed him and led him to a seat.

"Is there any place you would like to go?" He stopped short, almost hoping she had not heard. If she wished to travel now, she must go without him. He could not take her.

Hilda hesitated a moment, and then said softly, —

"May I see the island?"

"What island?"

"Where I lived before you took me — before — before my mother died."

The tears that she had feared dropped upon her cheeks unnoticed. Now that she had spoken this desire so long held in secret, she felt relieved, and the memories that her own words brought made her unmindful of the tears. There was a long silence. This request had caused Mr. Alexander the greatest astonishment. But the alarm of the revelation passed, and he began to find a comfort

in it. She did not wish to leave him. He could still be near her. And then it was this very affection and remembrance of what she loved that had held her close to him. Had it not been for this, he must have lost her when she first went away to the convent. So when he spoke, he said cheerily, "If it is a bright day to-morrow, we will go." In a few moments he continued quietly, "Do you remember Jean Pilliod?"

"Yes. Is he still there?"

"Old Jean is dead. He left the island to his grandson, Pierre, who leases it to a neighbouring farmer. No one lives there now. Alphonse and his wife went back to France where, I believe, they inherited some property from an uncle."

"And my mother?"

"I do not know."

"Dear uncle, don't think because I cried a little that I am unhappy. I do not grieve for her. It is not that. I sometimes think of her beauty and of her love for me, and the tears just come. But you must not mind. I know that it does not matter where she lies, for, as Uncle Christopher would say, all the earth is good, and that,

wherever her soul or body may be, none of their beauty can be lost."

That evening, Mr. Alexander remained later than usual. He had certainly never been conscious of Hilda's restless desire for him to go, but on this occasion he felt her mood of increased tenderness, and it made him linger with her. She wanted him to stay; she felt that she could not love him enough for all his goodness to her. It brought her a great happiness to again be able to sit near him and be content. When he went, she accompanied him to the gate and watched him until he disappeared up the dark street. And yet all this while there had been something left unsaid. She walked slowly back to the house. She stopped a moment by the porch and then passed on to the enclosure. Why had she not spoken to him of Pierre? Her tears, her pallor, the drooping of her head, and the burden in her heart were not all due to her memory of the island and her mother. These were but the excuses made to herself and to him.

It is singular how long a maiden will dream of her lover without naming him as

such, even to herself. For almost a month Pierre had wooed her from his balcony, and she had listened. Her whole being was throbbing to the melody of his flute and to the cry of his heart, as it had come to her on the night winds. Her lips alone were mute. Had she known the nature of her own emotions, she might, perhaps, have revealed them to Primrose. She could have talked to her of Pierre, had his name once passed between them. But the thought of him filled her with alarm when in the presence of Mr. Alexander. Our instincts may be but the memories of which we are unconscious. The incident of the rose vine had passed from Hilda's mind, but her heart had retained the impression it had made.

And yet, as she went into the enclosure that night, she was happier than she had been for a long time. She had given expression to some of her secret desires and emotions, and was a little nearer to a comprehension of them all.

Pierre had been waiting for her with all the apprehension lovers feel at even the smallest delay. For them absence is not

a matter of time—it is absence. Each moment is an eternity, filled with disaster.

When he saw her enter, he thrilled with delight. His eyes shone and filled with tears. He might never have seen her again, and she was here. He put the flute to his lips, and sent her a greeting so tender and so joyous that she raised her eyes, and looked toward him smiling.

It was a wonderful night for both. The late moon had passed entirely from view when Hilda looked once again toward the balcony, and murmuring a very, very faint "Good night," returned to the house. When she had gone, Pierre looked down into the shadows and up to the stars, wondering, confused, half delirious. She had looked at him; she had smiled upon him; she had whispered "Good night."

In certain natures great beauty is alone sufficient to work a kind of madness. To describe what Pierre saw as he stood on his balcony, one must know what shapes the wind can assume, what spirits brood in the night. For three hours he had been sitting in the moonlight, his mistress in a garden beneath him. He had looked into

her eyes. He had sought in vain for some word to speak to her, and had trembled with the fear that one might escape him. He had taken his flute from his lips, and sighed again and again. Its notes were too sad or too cold. There was no sound in it so sweet, so tender, so passionate as his thoughts. There was no voice anywhere to speak for him. This was surely all madness, but he who has not experienced it has remained too sane.

Dawn found Pierre far from the city. He had come across the fields, and was walking near the river toward Maumee. He scarcely knew where he had been, nor why he was there. It had been an aimless wandering under the starry sky—the ever pathetic effort of the feet to follow the free fancies of the soul. He sat on the high bluff overlooking the island and watched the day break. His face was pale from his vigil. He had forgotten his hat, and his hair had been handled roughly by the wind.

The shadows faded from the earth. The sky became bright and clear. The birds in passing tossed him a song. The island with its ripening fields and flowering borders lay

beneath him, warm and glowing in the sunlight. His face relaxed, he began to see once more the things about him. He felt his weariness. When the Angelus sounded from the villages, he closed his eyes and listened. The sound brought him peace. He walked on slowly now, for the sun was growing warm, and he was sleepy. He descended the path, found his boat moored to its stake, and pushed into the stream. He drifted with the current until, reaching a little inland curve where a few willows grew on the bank, he pushed into their shade. Wild grape-vines grew about the trees, climbing to their tops and hanging in festoons from the branches. There is no sweeter perfume than that of the flower of the wild grape. These vines were now in bloom. Pierre cut an armful of twigs, covered with leaves and blossoms, and spread them in his boat. He rolled up his coat for a pillow, stretched himself on his bed, and slept. His wild fancies of the night did not trouble his sleep. They had passed with the stars and the shadows. His dream was at first but the echo of the morning bells. He listened to them with the old unmindfulness of his boyhood. He was again lying on his

back in the grass, watching the clouds, again carrying stones for his city on the hill. Sometimes in his dreams he looked away down the river, but with none of the old desire to go there. He wished, rather, that what he missed would return to him. He watched the coming of the boat, no longer seeing in it a means of escape, but hoping with all his lonely heart that it would bring to him again what it had taken away. The dream passed, and he slept long and soundly. Late in the afternoon he awoke with a start, and, sitting up quickly, glanced with eager expectation toward the shore. He saw Hilda under the willows, looking at him in surprise and confusion.

Mr. Alexander had driven with Hilda to the island. During the ride up the river he had scarcely spoken. His life was passing before him again. He had lived in dreams and busied himself with concerns that hardly interested him. And his theories, what were they? He shook his head and wondered at the passing of their importance. His dreams had been both sad and sweet. His theories had been nothing. He looked at Hilda. He had once hoped never to see the shadow

of trouble in her face. The shadow was there, but so soft and faint that it only gave a tenderness to her beauty. He would not alter it. He thought of his friend Mott and the plants he had liberated. The recollection brought a smile and a sigh.

“She shall be free,” he thought. “Her life is her own. I can only love her.”

He marvelled more and more at the silent independence of her life. It had, indeed, been her own; but he also realized that her affection had been a magnet, drawing to it and retaining only the good and the beautiful.

When they were opposite the island, he called to a man in the field to carry them over. Then he left her to go her way, for he found it difficult to walk. He found a place under a tree where the grass was thick and the view was good. Here he would wait for her. He tried to follow her in his thoughts. Did she remember the day when he had first seen her? It seemed to him like yesterday. He saw her smiling at him across the table, he found himself trying to untangle the phrases that had become involved. He smiled at the little legs stretch-

ing to keep step with his own. The afternoon passed. He stood up and looked over the island. A little stroll, he thought, would take the stiffness from his body. And so he, too, came to the willows a full hour after Pierre had awakened, to find Hilda there.

He was surprised to hear voices, and still more surprised, when, looking through the grape-vines, he saw Hilda in the boat with Pierre. At first, it was only his amazement and his anger that prevented an instant interruption of the pretty scene. As he looked, however, his mood softened. It is true that this youth was holding the hand of his Hilda; but there was so much happiness in their eyes, and such a glow in their faces, they seemed so oblivious to the world, and so well acquainted with each other, that he could only look and wonder. In a few moments he began to understand. She called him Pierre, and as they talked, and talked, it was all "Do you remember?" and "Do you remember?" Had he still waited and listened, he might have heard even sweeter words, for they, too, were spoken. But he did not wait.

“She shall be free,” he said. “No theory of mine can bring such a bloom to her cheek, such a light in her eye. She shall have the free sunlight and air and what love life has for her.”

She found him at twilight, apparently dozing under his tree.

“You have had a good sleep?” She tried to look as though nothing had occurred.

“Just dozing a little. It has made you happy to come here. I can see it, my dear. Don’t hide your happiness from me.” He looked at her wistfully and hoped she would tell him, but she did not know. She vaguely felt the change that had come, however, and was happy to sit close to him on the drive home, and, holding his hand, think of her meeting with Pierre, and of the night still to come.

“She cannot tell me,” he thought, “and it is my own fault.”

That evening he took Mr. Mott into the garden and told him what he had seen.

“And now,” he said, “there is but one thing to do. Let us send for Pierre.”

“Do you remember, Minot, why I have never kept a hive in my garden?”

“Why is that?”

“Because the bees come to me.”

“Stuff and nonsense,” said the other. “What are you talking about? I have been speaking of Hilda, and you do not listen. I say we must send for Pierre.”

Mr. Mott laughed, and Mr. Alexander grew red.

“Come with me, Minot. You shall see what I mean.”

He led his friend to the enclosure, and, pointing to the window and the balcony, said:—

“Every night a fine bee is there humming. Do you understand? It is Pierre.”

“Pierre?”

“Yes.”

“How long?”

“Ever since her return.”

“Hilda?”

“Every night she is here in the garden.”

Mr. Alexander turned slowly away.

“What a fool I have been!”

“My friend, she has come to a fine flower.”

“But it was not through me.”

“No? But you have done all that the

best of gardeners could do. You provided the good soil and shelter from the storm."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the other, with a choke in his voice; but he was comforted.

That night Primrose, at her window, followed the progress of her romance as far as the first kiss, then silently closed the blinds.



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